# SPECIAL WARFARE

# ETHICS AND SPECIAL OPERATIONS

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A U.S. Army Special Operations Soldier loads a magazine.

U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. William Chockey

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# From the
# COMMANDANT

The question of ethics in Army Special Operations is a continuous one. As a force we have done great things for our country. We have defended democracy and literally freed the oppressed. And while we have gotten our share of acclaim for those tasks, we have also been under a spotlight due to actions and activities of some members of our Army Special Operations Forces.

As representatives of this great nation, everything we do is a reflection not only on our nation, but also on our Army and our Regiments. Joining a Special Operations Regiment isn't easy. You are assessed and selected not only physically and mentally, but also for your character. Over the past couple of years, what we see in the news has not been reflective of who we are and who our nation calls us to be. In this issue, we talk about some tough issues. We talk about some of our failures and how we can do better.

Why? Because that is what our nation expects of us. As you deploy overseas, you stand the line for freedom. Our ability to be looked at in that manner is impacted when we fail to stand the moral and ethical lines our leaders, and more importantly our nation, expects.

As you read this issue, think about your actions, your team's actions and how they reflect not just on you as a Soldier, but on our nation.

**PATRICK B. ROBERSON**
**MAJOR GENERAL, USA**
COMMANDING GENERAL

"Special Operations Soldiers are expected to operate with the highest standards of ethics and honor …. We will hold ourselves and each other accountable to these high standards every day because lives are on the line."

*— Guidance on Ethics for Special Operations Forces*

## FROM THE EDITOR

# IS THERE AN ETHICAL CRISIS IN ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS?

Does Army Special Operations have an ethics crisis? Before you rush to answer "NO!" Think about what you see on the news. Think about what you hear about other members of ARSOF Regiments. If you haven't thought about it before, it is time to start a very serious conversation.

Does ARSOF have an ethics problem? That is a question that comes up frequently when something an ARSOF Soldier does makes the news ... and if you have not noticed ... it happens a lot. Over the past several years, different people, different entities and organizations have taken a look at the topic, and when the rubber hits the road there is some disagreement.

I have been around Special Operations Soldiers since 1997. My son's godfather is a Green Beret. Many of our family's closest friends serve in Special Forces, Psychological Operations or Civil Affairs. Working at SWCS, I have had a front row seat to amazing feats of bravery and daring; relationship building and information sharing that happens when our ARSOF Soldiers are doing their best. I often tell people that I am honored to work among these great Americans, but...

I am also the person who gets the Friday night phone calls when our Soldiers are at their worst. As a person who is inclined to see the greatness of our force, it doesn't stop me from seeing where it goes wrong, sometimes, so very wrong.

When I was tasked to put together an ethics issue of Special Warfare, I sought out the people who could or would be honest brokers. And some of those articles you will find in this issue. But, I also wanted to look at the numbers ... because numbers tell a story.

I wanted to reach out to someone who found themselves lost ... and I spent countless days, e-mails and phone calls cajoling the warden of a federal prison to let me interview such a person. The interview with Dan Gould, a former 7th Special Forces Group Soldier, is in this issue. Some thought that his words put the Regiment in a bad light ... but guess what? So do the numbers.

Before you gather the tribe and start to nay say or justify the perception. Let's look at the numbers from 2004 to today. Offenses range from driving while impaired to improper use of funds to adultery, drugs and murder. You name it, it's happened. And, that probably doesn't surprise you. But I want to put it in a totally different perspective.

If you woke up tomorrow and turned the television on and heard that 40 Special Forces Teams had disappeared in thin air ... what would you think?

Forty teams of people who are willing to put their lives on the line. Forty teams of professionals who just disappeared. What would you think about that?

Well, it's time to think. Those 40 teams represent the number of Soldiers whom have been removed from the Special Forces Regiment for illegal behavior — and that doesn't even include the members of the Psychological Operations Regiment, the Civil Affairs Regiment or Army Special Operations Aviation Regiment.

These numbers reflect the number of Soldiers ... your friends ... your teammates ... whom have lost their Green Berets and their careers because of unethical behavior. Too many Soldiers, good Soldiers, people whom trained rigorously, deployed around the world and did what the nation called on them to do were sidelined by a lack of ethical decision making and lack of ethical behavior.

Ask yourself: Does SOF have an ethics problem? If you think so, imagine what our Army leaders, government leaders, and most importantly, the American people think about the force?

More and more, people are saying yes. Recent Congressional inquiries and studies have pointed out reasons why these problems occur. But first and foremost, Army Special Operations is people focused. It's team oriented and team driven. Each one of these Soldiers who lost their beret was someone's teammate, someone's brother. Our ethical problems won't be solved by ignoring them. It will be solved by people taking care of each other, people holding their leaders, their subordinates,their brothers and themselves accountable. SW

**EDITOR'S NOTE:**

Views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect official Army position. This publication does not supersede any information presented in other official publications.

# DEVELOPING SOF MORAL REASONING

## Preparing Humans for Hard Wear on the Moral Terrain
### BY CAPTAIN BENJAMIN ORDIWAY

## ASSESSING THE (SYSTEMIC) PROBLEM

Throughout the Special Operations Forces' pipelines, instructors educate and train students to anticipate and respond to threats within the physical and human terrain. Unfortunately, the moral terrain is often an afterthought. This is the body of moral past promises, obligations, duties to oneself and others, religious or secular moral beliefs, etc.,  present in any given situation set against the backdrop of one's membership in the profession of arms.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to clarify the terms ethics and morality. Morality, simply put, concerns our ideas of right and wrong, and ethics is the second-order evaluation of moral claims or moral systems. If one is unaware of the moral reasoning that leads to an action, or if one's moral reasoning is corrupted, any talk of higher-order ethical reflection is likely to be unproductive. In volunteering for military service, one inherits the moral obligation to honor and uphold the professional military ethic. Therefore, I focus on morality rather than ethics throughout this piece.

Moral reasoning is how we navigate the moral terrain. It is the process of determining right action from wrong and ultimately what one ought to do.[01] This vital skill receive little systematic attention throughout the SOF pipelines. Case in point, the first time SOF receive significant instruction related to moral reasoning is at Intermediate Level Education — long after serving on a tactical-level team.[02]

Operational units, in turn, compound the problem. Quality education and training build competency. Unfortunately, units instead employ a combination of ad hoc leader professional development sessions, compulsory legal briefs, and frequent calls to "live up to our values." As headlines continue to make clear,[03] it is worth revisiting how SOF are educated and trained for moral reasoning.

If SOF are not educated or trained for moral reasoning before joining a team, surely it must be a selection consideration. It is not. Psychopathology tests and personality inventories are not sufficient for assessing moral reasoning.[04] Perhaps SOF unit leadership assumes a service member's prior military experience provided a foundation in moral reasoning. Even if this was true — and it is not — it would be insufficient given the significant percentage of  SOF who have no prior military experience outside of, for example, Infantry One-Station Unit Training.[05]

The results of not assessing, selecting, educating or training for moral reasoning are as predictable as they are perennial: unfortunate headlines, comprehensive reviews,[06] congressional testimony,[07] and calls for increased civilian oversight.[08] We have a problem. Repeated moral transgressions jeopardize the very foundation of the professional military: Society's trust in SOF's ability to self-regulate.

Photo Above
**U.S. Army Special Operations team members survey the landscape during combat operations in Southeast Afghanistan.**
U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY SGT. JAERETT ENGESETH

## THE FIRST SOF TRUTH

Humans are more important than hardware, and they are also more complicated than software. First, consider what separates humans from software: emotion, intuition, desire and the ability to rationalize. Next, consider that the ethical reasoning models taught at various professional military education venues ignore these human qualities. In doing so, the current models imply that we can process moral terrain data like glitch-free software.

This is not to say that referencing a model when making decisions is not beneficial. On the contrary, doing so can standardize educational and training approaches. But any decision-making model involving moral content must address, on the one hand, glitches in the processing, namely, motivated reasoning, moral disengagement and cognitive biases. On the other hand, the model should also weigh intuitional inputs — those emotional cues and moral perceptions comprising one's conscience.

General Dwight Eisenhower declared, "Plans are worthless, but planning is everything."[09] In much the same way, practicing moral reasoning using a process can help prepare us for those situations that may confound our best-laid plans. Yet by itself, a block of instruction on a new decision-making process is not enough to improve one's moral reasoning, much less hone one's conscience.[10] After all, the human conscience, unlike software, is intuitive and requires experience. Therefore, my argument has two parts:

1. Current ethical reasoning models are flawed and counterproductive. They do not sufficiently address the human qualities, good or bad, of those navigating the moral terrain. As such, they are unable to develop moral reasoning beyond the classroom.
2. Operational units must explicitly incorporate ethics education into field training. It is only through connecting new knowledge with practice in an applied environment that we may realize and improve our moral reasoning.

First, I will define some key terms used throughout this article. Then I will survey representative decision-making models involving moral content taught at various Professional Military Education venues. I end with an appeal to PME faculty and operational units to address shortcomings in educating and training for moral reasoning.

## KEY CONCEPTS

### System One, System Two

In his 2011 book *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, Daniel Kahneman popularized the concept of two unique yet overlapping cognitive processes: "system one" and "system two."[11] Beginning with the latter, system two thinking is deliberate, slow (relative to system one), and effortful.[12] We tend to think of ourselves as supremely rational, utility-maximizing decision-makers. We are, but only rarely. This rarity is because system two thinking is mentally and physically taxing. Just imagine slogging through life with each decision requiring the focus you might (should!) apply to a change of command inventory — every day would be an all-nighter.

Unlike system two, system one thinking is intuitive, rapid, involuntary, associative and requires minimal effort.[13] It often employs mental shortcuts which are unquestionably helpful and accurate in many circumstances. For example, if you have ever driven home from work without recalling the journey, system one was at the wheel. Still, system one can lead us astray.

*The young girl peered over the fence to see the neighborhood bully repeatedly kicking a homeless kitten.* What emotion arises? Disgust? Surprise? Did you picture the bully as a boy or girl? Your feelings and the image of the bully arrived at the conscious level by way of system one thinking. The emotional jolt, even if minor, conveys a moral interpretation of the situation; abusing animals feels wrong. If you pictured the bully as a boy, you likely employed the *availability heuristic* — relying on easily recallable examples when considering a situation.[14] Perhaps Sid from the movie *Toy Story* came to mind. The point here is not that you are wrong or right. It is that, prior to any rational interpretation, you intuitively perceived a moral transgression (perhaps aided by emotions). Along the way, system one heuristics and biases may have muddled or assisted the process.

Here is the end of the story: *later that day, the same bully falls off his (or her!) bike, breaks an arm, and begins wailing — not unlike that homeless kitten.* What emotion arises now? What thought comes to mind? Perhaps you think, "A bully gets what a bully deserves." This mor-

ally weighted causal thinking — the bad kid did a bad thing; therefore, a bad thing happened to a bad kid — is known as the *just-world bias*.[15] In this case, the just-world bias may skew that perception and lead you away from an appropriate response such as helping the child and alerting the parents. System one's positive or negative influence on our judgment tends to go unnoticed unless we reflect on a situation and our response to it.

### Motivated Reasoning: The "Barracks Lawyer" Within

Suppose you can recall a time when you or a coworker altered a criterion weight during course of action comparison to push a preferred course of action across the finish line. In that case, you have a working knowledge of *motivated reasoning*. When we use our reason not to discover the truth but to justify the conclusion we prefer and feel is objective, we are motivated reasoners.[16] In selectively recruiting evidence to support a desired belief and scrutinizing information we do not want to believe, we are like a barracks lawyer. We argue for our client by citing regulations that align with our agenda while discounting or rejecting countering evidence. The reality that we tend to think as a barracks lawyer stands in contrast to the image we maintain of ourselves as dispassionate, critically thinking judges.

The moment you begin to develop a COA for a situation imbued with significant moral content (doubly true if it is *your* reputation on the line), any screening process that follows will often be skewed in support of that COA. Granted, this low-quality decision process may result in an arbitrary positive outcome. Yet, when we measure the quality of a decision process by its outcome alone, we risk widening our moral blind spot by conflating a lucky outcome with the quality of the decision process used[17] (see figure 01). It is better to be good than lucky.

Luck is unpredictable. You cannot educate for it, and you cannot train it. Therefore, when designing a decision process for the moral terrain, we should consider improving decision process quality and outcome by mitigating motivated reasoning. Applying choice architecture and precommitment strategies to decision criteria *before* developing COAs supports good decision-making of the upper quadrant kind in figure 01.

## Precommitment & Choice Architecture

Reflect on your most recent trip to the grocery store. If you were wiser than me, you wrote a list —that is, you practiced precommitment by deciding what items to purchase *before* entering the store.[19] Now, consider how the order on that list might alter the time and energy you spent wandering the aisles. If you designed your list so that items were ordered by the aisle they appeared in, you would likely be on your way to the parking lot sooner. You could also call yourself a *choice architect* because you manipulated features of the situation (the list and its connection to the store's layout) to affect choice.[20] The list helped determine the items purchased rather than the store's marketing tactics and your present appetite.

Additionally, by developing such a list, you may avoid aisles filled with temptation that you never intended to go down. In much the same way, a decision-making process that incorporates precommitment and choice architecture can provide structure to complex problems — even before you find yourself in one. A process that includes such considerations will also help navigate you toward optimal outcomes and avoid unfortunate diversions along the moral terrain.

## Moral Disengagement Mechanisms: Doing Wrong and Feeling Right

Moral disengagement is a psychological process by which we defeat the regulatory power of the two types of sanctions that serve as guardrails for behavior.[21] The first, external sanctions, often take the form of laws, organizational codes of conduct and group norms.[22] The second, self-sanctions, are those restraints we employ to maintain our self-respect and personal satisfaction.[23] When self-sanctions are engaged, behavior is likely to be personally and socially acceptable.[24] However, when external pressures manifest — such as an opportunity for personal financial gain or the prospect of avoiding reputational ruin by telling a simple lie — we sometimes resolve the conflict between those pressures and self-sanctions by disengaging the sanctions *while still maintaining a positive image of ourselves*.[25] Social psychologist Albert Bandura identified eight moral disengagement mechanisms that we employ to defeat self-sanctions.[26]

1. Moral justification (rationalization) — *construing a reprehensible action as serving socially worthy or moral purposes.*



**FIGURE 01: DECISION OUTCOME VS. DECISION QUALITY**
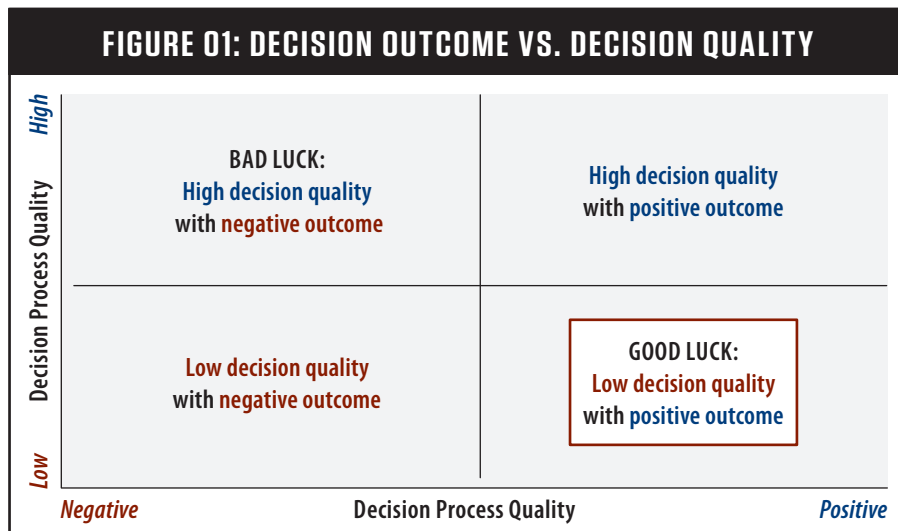
GRAPHIC ADAPTED FROM FELIX ROSSMANN, "DECISION QUALITY VS. DECISION OUTCOME"[18]

Example: a Special Forces Captain kills an unarmed, suspected bomb-maker—an apparent war crime. The officer declared that doing so prevented future casualties.[27]

2. Euphemistic labeling — *using sanitizing language to reduce personal responsibility or reframe a reprehensible act.* Example: "This is what it means to 'operate in the gray.'"

3. Advantageous comparison — *contrasting a known reprehensible action against a worse alternative.* Example: "A bit of rough treatment is fine; it's not like we're torturing them.

4. Distortion of consequences — *misrepresenting the harm of a reprehensible act by ignoring or minimizing its effects.* Example: "So I took a few of the team's meds; it's not a big deal; it's just this one time."

5. Displacement of responsibility — *pinning responsibility for one's actions on an authority figure or a mandate.* Example: "When the First Sergeant told us to 'handle things at our level,' this is what he meant."

6. Diffusion of responsibility — *spreading the responsibility for an action among a group.* Example: "We all agree to do this, right?"

7. "Dehumanization— *denying a person or group human attributes.* Example: A former Navy SEAL declares enemy combatants are "monsters." The same individual claims he used a wounded noncombatant as a practice dummy "to do medical scenarios on him until he died."

8. Attribution of blame-placing the responsibility for one's actions on the target of the action. Example: "It's not our fault; they brought this on themselves."[28]

## KEY TERM SUMMARY: A CAUSAL LOOP

A service member with moral reasoning habits that are mal-developed or misaligned with the professional ethic presents an increased risk to personnel and the mission.

The probability of transgression increases when motivated reasoning, enabled by an unreflective use of system one thinking and poor choice architecture, creates the cognitive space for moral disengagement. Disengagement becomes easier each time we do it by eroding the efficacy of external and self-sanctions. This moral erosion[29] increases the probability of future transgressions.

Suppose this causal loop is free to play out at the team level. In that case, it means that external sanctions do not exist, are ineffective, or are outright ignored. Over time, the team may become so morally toxic and so dangerously cohesive that its members are unable or unwilling to identify or admit that their actions were transgressive in the first place. This is what "disordered loyalty"[30] looks like. To make matters worse, add to this loop the acknowledged sense of entitlement,[31] initially fostered by SOF training, that pervades SOF organizational culture. It is important to address entitlement here because it is directly at odds with humility.

As I am advocating for a change in how PME and operational units educate and train SOF, intellectual humility is a necessary precondition. This is just one more reason why organizational leadership must aggressively combat any sense of entitlement within the ranks. It is not hard to find. One popular SOF recruit-

ing video perhaps captures the sense of entitlement best when the narrator, ostensibly a member of Special Forces, states with palpable condescension, "I never want my kids looking up to someone else." Those kids better not pursue work outside of Special Operations, for in the same video, the narrator implicitly demeans the majority of people who hold a so-called "normal job" — those who "wake up, go to work, come home, go to bed."[32]

According to the narrator's view, SOF are a chosen people to be set apart. If you hold such a view, you are fundamentally at odds with our civil-military norms. Those in Special Operations, just like the rest of the U.S. Military, exist to serve the American people.

Two months before the video landed on YouTube, a Special Forces Officer argued in the *Small Wars Journal* that SOF should be granted a "bifurcated ethics system." A system of one set of ethics for home and another while deployed is necessary, he claims, because "SOF operators are selected for a willingness and aptitude to conduct traditionally immoral acts, trained to be proficient at the conduct of those acts, but then expected to refrain from those acts outside of approved operational circumstances."[33] Ignoring the statement's patent falsity, it illustrates that there is a population within SOF who believe we should be entitled to a double standard when it comes to right and wrong. We should not.

How did we get here? Though there may be a selection and assessment aspect to the problem of the "causal loop," I argue that our education and training can, in part, mitigate this loop from occurring. With these points in mind, we turn to two of the current ethical decision-making models used by SOF and the wider military.

## CURRENT MODELS

### Education: The Ethical Triangle Decision-Making Model

Dr. Jack Kem, (*U.S. Army Colonel, Retired*) developed what is perhaps the most recognizable tool for ethical decision-making in the military: "The Ethical Triangle Decision-Making Model." Instructors teach the model at the Army Command and General Staff College, and students also encounter the model (or a derivation) at the Naval
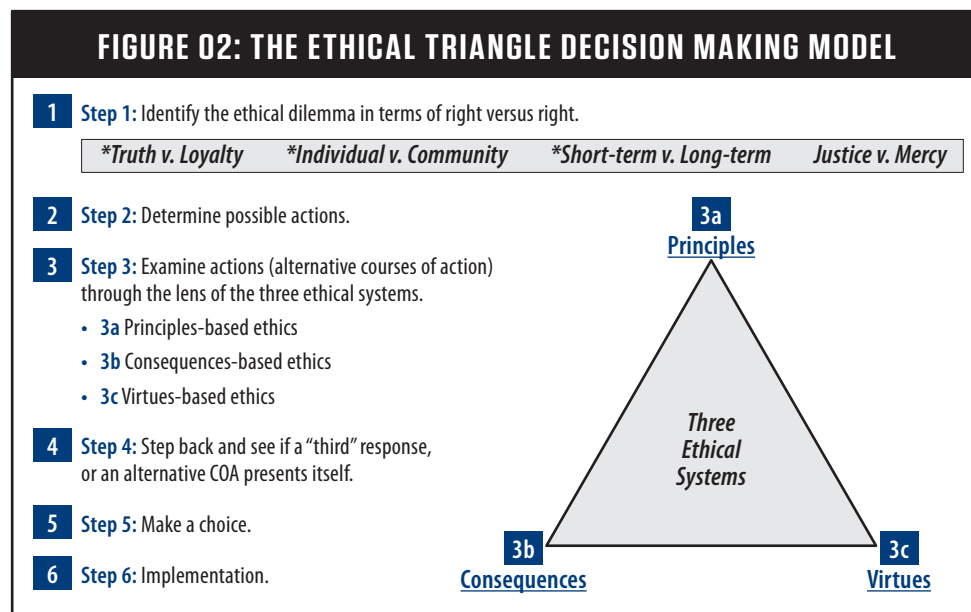
Postgraduate School and Joint Special Operations University. To its credit, the Ethical Triangle offers a practical way to frame a problem and exposes the decision-maker to normative frameworks (i.e., deontological, consequentialist and virtue approaches). Still, the Ethical Triangle is a strictly rational, system two approach. It does not draw our attention to intuitive processes and such phenomena as *motivated reasoning, moral disengagement,* and *cognitive biases* (see figure 02).

The main problem with the Ethical Triangle is that nobody, when personally involved in a situation with significant moral content, thinks like this. When faced with a situation — say, one where your character, career and reputation are on the line — a typical first step is to experience emotional turmoil. A next possible step is to frame the situation as a threat or benefit to self and employ moral disengagement mechanisms or to rationalize a way out. In short, in dispensing with system one considerations, the Ethical Triangle neglects the very humanity of the humans it is supposed to guide. Emotions will color one's interpretation of the situation and any duties or obligations connected to it for better or worse. It would be best, then, to confront our emotions and extract the useful moral information they may contain while being alert to their tendency to bias us in unhelpful ways. By grooming SOF for a rational, system two approach as typified by the Ethical Triangle, PME faculty miss the opportunity to educate students on how to retain the moral content of their emotions.

The Ethical Triangle also suffers from poor choice architecture. In placing "determine possible actions" (step 2) before "examine actions through the lens of the three ethical systems" (step 3), the model invites an individual to cherry-pick elements from normative frameworks which support an expedient COA. This approach to moral reasoning enables motivated reasoning and moral disengagement. Considering this from a terrain analysis perspective, officer basic and career courses do not teach students to develop a scheme of maneuver *before* identifying restricted terrain for a reason. This would be a recipe for casualties (or at least a lesson in vehicle recovery operations). In modifying choice architecture and employing a method of pre-commitment, we may detect restricted moral terrain before we become mired in it. In doing so, we are more likely to identify the narrow path(s) to the moral high ground.

### Training: The Special Operations Forces Ethics Field Guide

In 2020, the United States Special Operations Command released a "Special Operations Forces Ethics Field Guide."[35] Though the 55-page guide briefly discusses emotions and introduces moral disengagement mechanisms,[36] it does not include these considerations in its "Step-by-Step SOP for Ethical Decision Making." Like the Ethical Triangle, the SOF Ethics Field Guide's decision-making SOP assumes an ideal rational actor who follows a system two approach to decision-making, thereby neglecting the moral content of emotions and resulting moral intuitions as



**FIGURE 02: THE ETHICAL TRIANGLE DECISION MAKING MODEL**

**1 Step 1:** Identify the ethical dilemma in terms of right versus right.

| *Truth v. Loyalty* | *Individual v. Community* | *Short-term v. Long-term* | *Justice v. Mercy* |

**2 Step 2:** Determine possible actions.

**3 Step 3:** Examine actions (alternative courses of action) through the lens of the three ethical systems.
- **3a** Principles-based ethics
- **3b** Consequences-based ethics
- **3c** Virtues-based ethics

**4 Step 4:** Step back and see if a "third" response, or an alternative COA presents itself.

**5 Step 5:** Make a choice.

**6 Step 6:** Implementation.

**3a Principles**

**Three Ethical Systems**

**3b Consequences**

**3c Virtues**

GRAPHIC ADAPTED FROM JACK KEM, "USE OF THE 'ETHICAL TRIANGLE' IN MILITARY ETHICAL DECISION MAKING"[34]

01

**A student interacts with indigenous role players during the Civil Affairs Qualification Course. Instructors evaluate individual competency in civil engagements and give immediate feedback on performance. Training to develop moral reasoning could be done in a similar setting where SOF can perceive the moral terrain in emotionally salient contexts.**
U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY K. KASSENS

01

inputs. The guide also invites motivated reasoning through poor choice architecture i.e., "identify potential solutions" comes before "assess the solutions using ethical perspectives."[37]

Moreover, the field guide is overly ambitious in its didactic approach. While classroom discussion of abstract scenarios may be necessary, it is not sufficient for developing moral reasoning (akin to certifying one's land navigation abilities by assessing basic map knowledge). In fact, if not augmented by practical application, this approach may instill a superficial sense of competency through mere exposure. Exposure is no substitute for experience.

Training to develop moral reasoning requires moving from the classroom to the field where SOF can perceive the moral terrain within emotionally engaging contexts. Creating these contexts requires creativity and a general comfort with a developmental approach that may not neatly map onto traditional mission essential task assessments. Developing field-based moral reasoning training and evaluating its effectiveness will be challenging. SOF leaders have met this challenge with other field-based training already recognized as essential. For example, Civil Affairs training often includes evaluations of individual competency in civil engagement immediately followed by an after-action review.[38, 39]

At the very least, the limitations of classroom-based instruction in moral reasoning should be made clear to those undergoing instruction, and the teaching materials themselves should not send the wrong message. Aside from its flawed choice architecture, the SOF Ethics Field Guide sends many wrong messages. For example, the guide suggests that SOF individuals develop a "character brand."[40] In doing so, the guide treats moral character as if it were a function of reputation — something to add commercial value to an organization. To be sure, an organization may reap instrumental benefits from employing those with strong moral character. For example, employees may be less likely to engage in conflicts of interest or to use their position for financial gain, thereby maintaining the company's reputation and likely its profits in the long run. Still, moral character is deeper and more personal than an outward-facing brand. Long before its instrumental utility, moral character is *intrinsically* valuable. Employing moral reasoning (and the necessary moral courage) will often come at a cost to one's reputation in the short term. This is especially true in hierarchical organizations that place great value on loyalty and obedience, i.e., the military.

## SUMMARY: EDUCATING & TRAINING FOR MORAL REASONING

Educators and those designing military training must not ignore the dual-process character of our minds. Perhaps they do so because the current decision-making models are relatively easy to teach and are conducive to the talking-as-training paradigm. Unfortunately, when we neglect motivated reasoning, and moral disengagement, we miss the opportunity to educate or train against these dangerous cognitive threats. Just as bad, when we adopt an exclusively system two approach to moral reasoning, we unintentionally reject our intuitive moral perceptions and the associated emotions that form our conscience. If we retain and analyze these moral signals conveyed by system one cognition, we stand to be guided toward appropriate thought, intention, and action.

In summary, I argue that any effective moral reasoning process for the SOF moral terrain must consider the following:

1. Moral reasoning can only be sufficiently developed when there is an emotional investment in experiential contexts involving significant moral content. Implication: *Abstract scenarios, LPDs for legal briefs are necessary but insufficient indeveloping moral reasoning.*

2. Emotions convey moral content that, if analyzed, can illuminate competing basic *(prima facie)*[41] duties present in a situation. Implications: *To appreciate the role of emotions in moral reasoning, SOF may need to revisit skewed interpretations of stoicism[42] and reject a "warrior culture"[43] that stands as an*

obstacle to emotional vulnerability and introspection.

3. We can only assess moral reasoning in environments where SOF feel psychologically safe to practice it. That is, we must ensure that social desirability bias — the desire to behave in ways that cause others to view us favorably[44] — is sufficiently suppressed. Implication: *Either monitor SOF without their knowledge or create a training environment that seeks to develop rather than assess. If you aim to build trust, take the latter approach.*

4. Intentional exposure to situations involving significant moral content, coupled with developmental reflection opportunities, can (1) increase moral sensitivity — the ability to recognize moral issues in complex situations[45] — (2) develop moral reasoning, and (3) strengthen an organization's moral fiber. Implications: *Put individuals and then teams in situations that replicate anticipated moral threats and create opportunities for moral courage. Then provide them coaching and time to reflect on their moral reasoning[46] so that strength of character—not situational factors—are more predictive of behavior.[47]*

## CONCLUSION

SOF operations present enough risk already. Leaders needlessly assume more risk by failing to prepare personnel for the complexities of the moral terrain. Navigating that terrain with honor requires proficiency in moral reasoning. If SOF do not assess and select for moral reasoning, it must be developed through education and training. It is my hope that PME institutions and SOF leadership will consider these recommendations. Doing so will help secure SOF's tenuous foot-hold on the moral high ground. ⬡

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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# E T H I C S   I S
# —LEADER—
# BUSINESS

## BY DR. JOSEPH E. LONG AND DR. KARI A. THYNE

The ethical environment familiar to experienced special operators is distinct and peculiar from the ethical environments in which other military formations operate. The defining distinction is the nature of leading micro-level partner forces that includes "irregular, predominately indigenous personnel organized along military lines" often for the purpose of conducting "military and paramilitary operations in enemy-held, hostile or denied territory," an experience unique to SOF.[01] The relational leadership requirements for SOF formations in such complex combat environments often expose newer SOF operators to leadership roles that greatly exceed the requirements for service members of similar rank, leaving many SOF professionals vulnerable to ethical dilemmas that are not covered in standard professional military education programs.

Furthermore, special operators execute partner-force leadership as part of small, decentralized teams, and they often rely entirely on their partners for safety. Special Operators are likely to find themselves making ethical decisions that require unique considerations, and, thus, they should be trained and educated to maximize operational effectiveness while balancing ethical challenges in environments where direct authority is limited. To offer perspective, a model of the SOF ethical decision-making environment builds on classical ethics literature to help Special Operators make better operational decisions while avoiding ethical problems, moral drift, and moral injury.[02, 03]

For many, the idea of a unique ethical environment for SOF is nothing more than an excuse for bad behavior. However, the reality is that SOF teams typically deploy in ways that are, in fact, unique within the Department of Defense. SOF teams are not only small, decentralized, and often operating alone, they are always in potentially life-threatening danger and reliant on partner forces and indigenous populations for survival. The 2017 ambush of American Green Berets in Niger reminds us of the danger to SOF operators wherever they go. To reduce this inherent risk, SOF teams must understand the virtues of relational and cross-cultural leadership styles and the reality that building connectedness through relationships is essential to survival and operational success.[04]

## SOF-SPECIFIC, PARTNER-FORCE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES

The aforementioned case of the 2017 Niger ambush is a solemn reminder that beyond military planning, advanced communications, superior weapons and equipment, and two decades of combat experience in mature combat theaters, personal relationships with partner forces and local populations enhance the survivability of SOF practitioners. Trust is a key element for effective partner-force leadership as a function of strengthening the "confident expectation" that SOF and partner forces "will act confidently and dutifully" as a unified team.[05] Ethical decision-making with partner forces can inspire a compounded, or "multiplicative — or exponentially contagious" problem for SOF teams who never fully control their micro-level ethical climates.[06] SOF teams, therefore, must understand and overcome these compounded frictions in order to build trust, the critical glue that holds SOF and partner forces together.

Unfortunately, there are times when ethical concerns of SOF units sharply conflict with the distinct needs of micro-level or paramilitary partner forces, causing risk to force, risk to mission and even risk to strategy to skyrocket.[07] This reality underscores the responsibility for SOF leaders at all levels to ensure SOF practitioners are as prepared and educated to overcome the peculiar ethical challenges that emerge in complex Special Operations as they are to overcome tactical, operational, and strategic challenges. Ethical decision-making in SOF environments is a skill that requires the same emphasis as other tactical SOF skills.

## ETHICS IS LEADER BUSINESS: UNDERSTANDING SIX SOF ETHICAL TRUTHS

To better understand the distinct nature of SOF ethics, ethical research from the Joint Special Operations University distills the philosophical and operational aspects of ethical decision-making into what are proposed as six SOF Ethical Truths designed to mirror the five SOF Truths.[08] The first SOF Ethical Truth recognizes the realities of human nature and states, "Individual moral character is neither inherent nor fixed. Ethical decision-making requires continuing education for even the most experienced SOF operators. Members of SOF units who cannot be shaped by education and experience must be removed from SOF formations."[09] Despite the debate as to whether humans are born with moral character or create it in themselves, the first SOF Ethical Truth is a reminder that people can nonetheless develop and shape moral character over the course of a career and a lifetime. In short, individual moral character, like any other combat skill, will both improve with practice but decline with neglect.

One way to develop and shape moral character is through education. Education is a means to moral fitness in the same way exercise is a means to physical fitness. Since military leaders remain responsible for ensuring the physical, technical, and moral fitness of their subordinates, the first SOF Ethical Truth underscores the reality that ethics is leader business. SOF leaders have an obligation to provide

# SOF ETHICAL TRUTHS*

### #1
Moral character is neither inherent nor fixed.

### #2
SOF operators will be morally challenged when
they are least prepared to deal with it.

### #3
SOF ethical decision-making must
consider the harsh realities of SOF environments
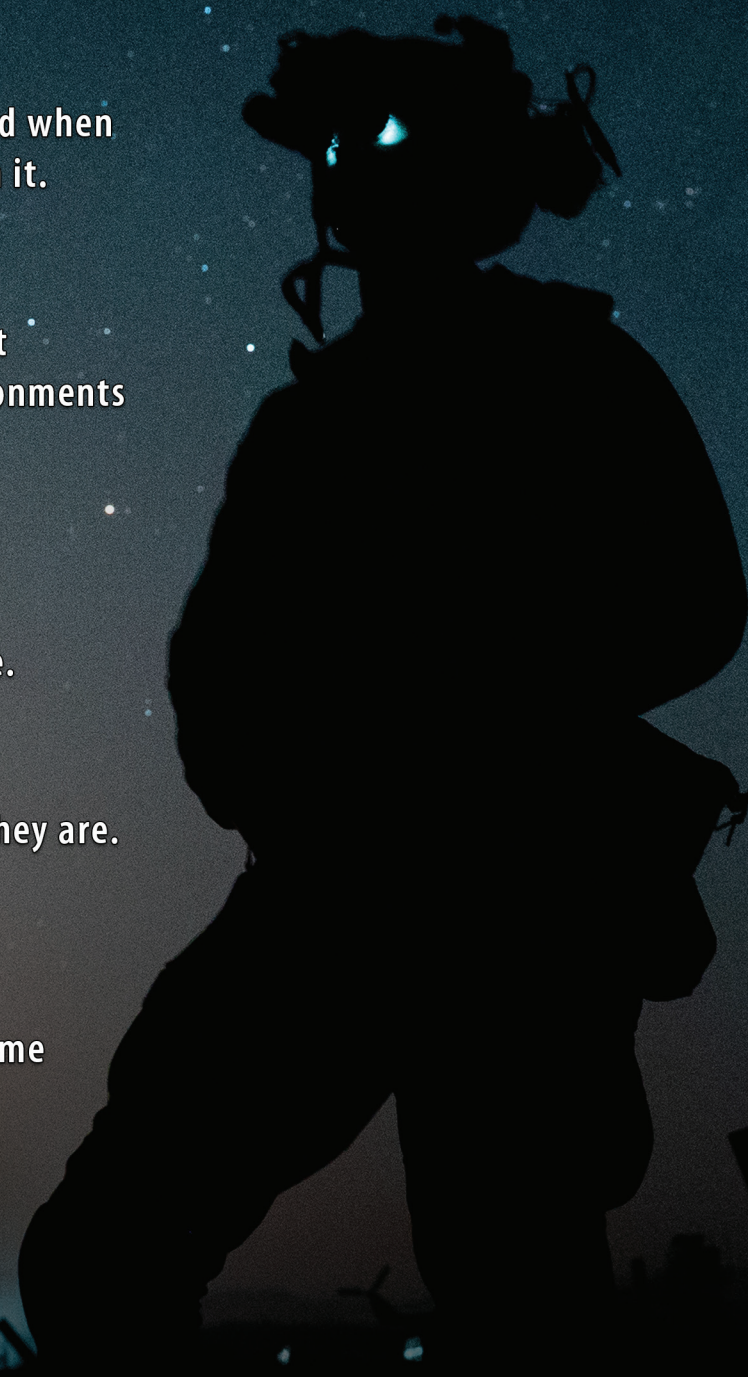and operational requirements.

### #4
Binary ethical codes
do not provide sufficient guidance.

### #5
People are not as ethical as they think they are.

### #6
Conversations about ethical
decisions, good and bad, must become
a natural occurrence.

effective, SOF-specific, ethical education to their units and to remove SOF members who cannot be shaped by education and experience. As with other respected professions that deal with highly complex environments, SOF environments invite moral drift, particularly when Special Operators are not prepared ahead of time. Unchecked moral drift, emerging as the natural tendency for ethical boundaries to become blurred, leads to many undesirable outcomes and often contributes to operational ineffectiveness.

Supporting the imperative to provide ethical education ahead of time, the second SOF Ethical Truth recognizes that "SOF operators will be morally challenged when they are least prepared to deal with it."[10] Although SOF does a great job of selecting and training special operators through rigorous assessment and training programs, ethical reasoning is a skill that often remains underdeveloped. Like other important SOF skills, ethical reasoning is strengthened by "slow thinking" as a function of education, conversation, and introspection.[11] Slow thinking helps Special Operators avoid cognitive biases and improve logical consciousness, which helps build the "cognitive reserve" necessary for making better combat decisions when Special Operators are caught in the moment, and there is only time for fast thinking.[12]

Building on how SOF operators must think, the third SOF Ethical Truth reinforces that "SOF ethical decision-making must be developed for the harsh realities of SOF environments and operational requirements. SOF units must see the world for the way it is, not for how they might want it to be."[13] SOF practitioners exercise expertise or influence across all aspects of multidomain warfare, and SOF's unique, cross-cutting capability is expertise in building and sustaining relationships across the human domain. The deeper this understanding of the human domain, i.e., human nature, other cultures and what is unique and peculiar about SOF environments, will ensure SOF practitioners see their strengths and weaknesses more clearly.

A deeper understanding of the essential characteristics of human nature will also help to ensure SOF practitioners see the complexity inherent in the ethical challenges they face. Even the strongest moral characters can be paralyzed by confusion when there are multiple standards of what is right and what is wrong, or the difference between what is more right or less wrong is hard to sort. Different religions, cultural customs, and societal norms lead to multiple standards of right and wrong, and Special Operators must operate and lead when no rules exist and when rules conflict.

The fourth SOF Ethical Truth recognizes the complexity of the SOF environment and emphasizes that "traditional" ethical education is largely unsuitable for SOF formations engaged in areas where ethical decisions are not often simply right or wrong. It states, "Binary ethical codes do not provide sufficient guidance" in SOF environments. In fact,



01

strict adherence to binary ethical codes can even be harmful in some SOF environments."[14] Why harmful? Because binary ethical codes encourage oversimplifying complex situations, leaving out too many relevant details, and eliminating necessary and pragmatic operational options. When Special Operators are exposed to these conditions, moral confusion can hamper operational effectiveness and leave ethical reasoning to randomness and luck.

Adding to the distinctiveness of the SOF Profession, the fifth SOF Ethical Truth recognizes that SOF leaders at all levels have a professional obligation to recognize the distinct nature of SOF ethics. Therefore, "SOF leaders should not be naïve or insensitive to human behavior and must recognize that people are not as ethical as they think they are. SOF operators require specific training to close the gap between the expectation and reality of what they must do."[15] This ethical truth is emphatic that leaders at all levels retain a professional responsibility to be mindful of the complex nature of the SOF Profession and ought not expect others to adhere to standards they were, or are, unable or unwilling to maintain. Further, this reminds leaders at all levels that ethical behavior is never one-size-fits-all; some SOF professionals will make decisions that are exceedingly rare and difficult to understand for those not present. As such, SOF leaders must hold SOF practitioners accountable while also recognizing that a reasonable person in a complex situation might make decisions that stymie others. No one is exempt from recogniz-

DIFFERENT RELIGIONS, CULTURAL CUSTOMS, AND SOCIETAL NORMS LEAD TO MULTIPLE STANDARDS OF RIGHT AND WRONG, AND SPECIAL OPERATORS MUST OPERATE AND LEAD WHEN NO RULES EXIST AND WHEN RULES CONFLICT.

ing the harsh realities of what special operators must do or from the obligation to ensure they are prepared.

Finally, the sixth SOF Ethical Truth accounts for the realities of the SOF culture as a function of the SOF Profession. As such, "SOF culture must be an environment where conversations about ethical decisions, good and bad, are a natural occurrence."[16] We know conversation is a critical part of education; we learn from others formally and informally. Asking one another questions, sharing experiences and developing possible solutions to case studies strengthens individual and team moral fitness. Making conversations about ethics part of SOF culture is wholly appropriate since moral fitness and ethical reasoning skills are key to how SOF practitioners navigate, operate, and dominate relationships across the human domain.

## THE NEXT STEP: UNDERSTANDING THE REALITIES OF HUMAN NATURE

The proposed six SOF Ethical Truths recognize how important it is for SOF formations to understand human nature, including acknowledging that human beings are all susceptible to moral drift. SOF formations must also recognize that moral drift is more than just a behavior problem; it reduces the strategic impact of SOF operations and often leads to undetected moral injury. While SOF operators might make suboptimal ethical decisions in the moment, the damaging effect of many bad decisions may take years to emerge and provide unfortunate incentives for SOF operators to consideration moral drift and moral injury.

A better understanding of the essence of human nature might be helpful. As humans, we are complex and complicated, but not everything about us is a mystery. The essence of human nature, good or bad, is far from settled. It is woven into the scholarly work of Plato and Aristotle, Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas Aquinas, and scholars and laymen alike continue to debate. Modern-day advocates of a common human nature include public intellectuals such as cognitive psychologist Steven Pinker and philosopher Mary Midgley. Pinker has also argued that a better understanding of human nature can help clarify our moral values,[17] and the ongoing debate is useful to understanding the impact of human nature on ethical decision-making in the SOF Profession.

One of the clearest conceptions of human nature comes from Niccolò Machiavelli, a 15th-century Italian political philosopher and government official with diplomatic and martial responsibilities. He thought human nature was unchanging and that a human today is essentially the same as those who lived in Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome. What changed was the situations humans found themselves in and Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome would be all but incomprehensible to us, were we to find ourselves in either. Likewise, the same can be said for those of Ancient Greece and Rome if they were to find themselves in the 21st century. Upon settling that human nature was unchanging, Machiavelli wondered whether human nature *could* be changed and after much consideration, he concluded that it could not.[18] Just as a tiger born, raised and living in captivity is still a wild animal, the consensus on human nature is that it does not and cannot change. Humans can change their behaviors, voluntarily or involuntarily, but they cannot change the essence and reality of human nature.

Human nature is also not simple or easy to understand, but the better we understand human nature, the better we understand ourselves and others. Such an understanding benefits SOF leaders who always have others for whom they are responsible. Of particular relevance are these essential characteristics of human nature: "We are an unstable mix of animal drives but have the capacity to discipline those animal drives in ourselves and in others. We are self-interested and often selfish, but we have the capacity to limit ourselves out of regard for others. We can modify our behaviors if we are motivated to do so. We often find that motivation in our respect for others."[19] We will do wrong, and often what is unethical, whenever we want if we think there is a reasonable chance of not being held accountable.[20] Finally, human beings are prone to moral drift.

As a fundamental aspect of human nature, moral drift is conceptually similar to mission creep. It is the gradual decline in how people regard ethical behavior; it occurs in individuals and within groups, often resulting from the pressures of organizational cultures.[21] When people experience moral drift or observe moral drift in others, they often remain unaware, although people more often drift for the worse not the better. Because inattention often goes hand-in-hand with moral drift, people and organizations

only realize it after the long-term effects of moral drift have become observable and, in many cases, the person or organization will have completely lost all original bearings and resort to rationalization.[22] When this happens, a significant event often shines a light on moral drift, leaving people and organizations shocked by the moral misbehavior of others. An absence of shock serves as a reminder that the organization may have also drifted right alongside them.

Moral drift left unchecked typically leads to moral misconduct, which is causal to moral injury. Although there are nuances to defining moral injury, a summary definition is a "violation of confidence in one's moral behavior or in expectations that others will behave in a just and ethical manner."[23] Moral injury manifests as profound emotional guilt and shame, and in some cases, also a sense of betrayal, anger, and profound moral disorientation. Given the complexity of ethical decision-making in SOF operational environments and the insufficiency of guidance in current ethical models, SOF units must find pragmatic anchors to improve ethical decision-making.

## TEAM DYNAMICS:
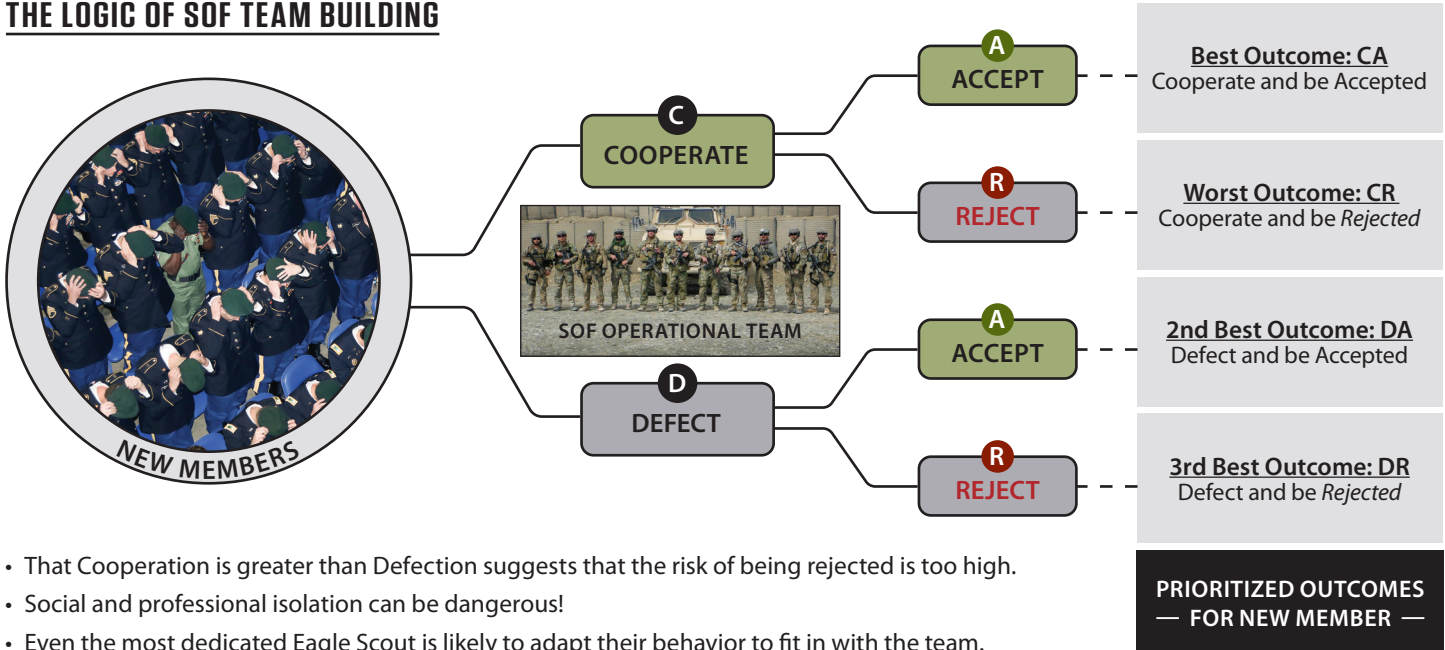## THE REALITIES OF SOF TEAM BUILDING

If we look at the logic behind ethical decisions in a SOF team environment, we will find that even the best-intentioned and most morally correct Eagle Scout is likely to experience moral drift when becoming part of a team. Ethical training provided only during qualification is largely insufficient for preparing a new Special Operator for the realities of the SOF Profession. Exploring the complexity of SOF team dynamics highlights why this is so. Consider the strategic choices facing even the most dedicated and morally correct SOF operator's initial arrival to his or her

operational SOF unit. Accepting that moral drift is a part of human nature, the new member will encounter a pre-existing team culture that exhibits some level of moral drift that varies between extremes as all teams are realistic representations of human nature and the reality of the SOF operational environment.

Following the logic of rational behavior in figure 01, when the new member joins a SOF team, he or she has an opening strategic choice. This eager new Special Operator, straight from the qualification course, will either go along with the status quo of the team (cooperate or C) or refuse to participate in behavior indicative of moral drift (defect or D). This choice will be reflected by the new member's behavior and will be recognized by his or her teammates. In response to the new member's strategic choice (cooperate or defect), the team responds with a similar choice between accepting the new member's discomfort with team culture (Accept or A) or expressing displeasure with the new member through social or professional exclusion (Reject or R).

The team dynamics model affords four strategic conditions: a new member will cooperate and be accepted (CA), cooperate and be rejected (CR), defect from the team and still be accepted (DA), or defect from the team and be rejected (DR). When looking through the eyes of the new member, we can rationally prioritize his or her likely preferences: Most likely, the new member's first preference will be to cooperate with the hopes of being accepted, with the worst result being for the new member to cooperate and still be rejected. This reflects the reality that limiting SOF education to the training pipeline will not change the way team dynamics shape individual behavior and SOF culture. In fact, the realities of the SOF operational environment suggest that being rejected by a team could be life-threatening. Again, SOF leaders cannot afford to be naïve or insensitive to this reality.

## THE LOGIC OF SOF TEAM BUILDING



NEW MEMBERS

SOF OPERATIONAL TEAM

**C** COOPERATE

**A** ACCEPT — **Best Outcome: CA** Cooperate and be Accepted

**R** REJECT — **Worst Outcome: CR** Cooperate and be *Rejected*

**D** DEFECT

**A** ACCEPT — **2nd Best Outcome: DA** Defect and be Accepted

**R** REJECT — **3rd Best Outcome: DR** Defect and be *Rejected*

PRIORITIZED OUTCOMES — FOR NEW MEMBER —

- That Cooperation is greater than Defection suggests that the risk of being rejected is too high.
- Social and professional isolation can be dangerous!
- Even the most dedicated Eagle Scout is likely to adapt their behavior to fit in with the team.
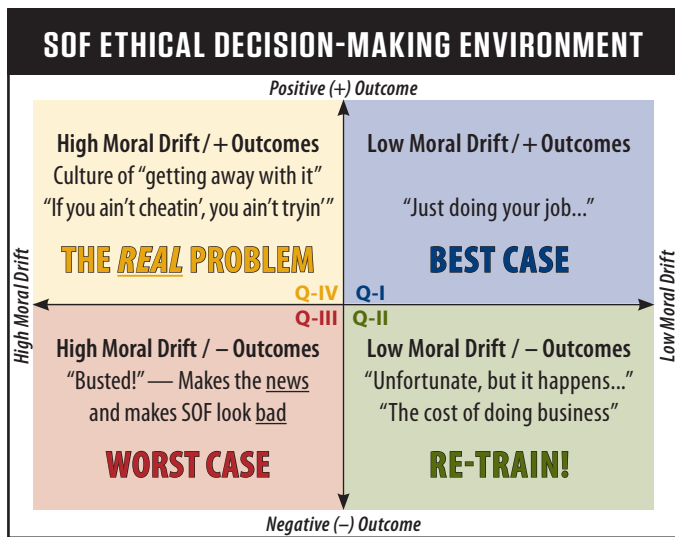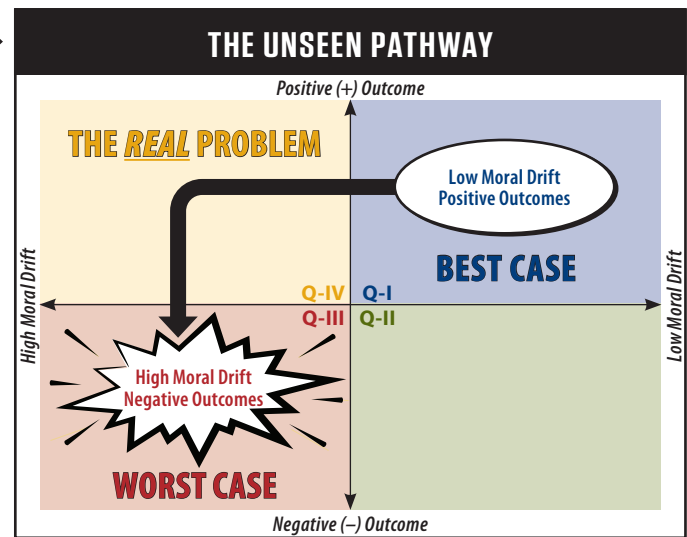
FIGURE 01

FIGURE 02



FIGURE 03

## NOW WHAT? MAKING BETTER DECISIONS

The model of the SOF ethical decision-making environment in figure 02 is a useful tool for examining two key components of SOF operations. The model recognizes roughly 2,500 years of Western philosophy as well as the realities of how human nature affects the SOF Profession. Likewise, the model accepts that SOF practitioners are exposed to moral drift and provides a common language that facilitates communication between practitioners and leaders across the joint SOF enterprise. The model respects the SOF Ethical Truths and creates more room for SOF operators and leaders to trust how each respond to ethical choices in operational environments. All SOF professionals share a responsibility for ensuring ethical conduct and for holding ourselves accountable. Understanding ethical complexity is not the same as tolerating bad ethical behavior.

The model of the SOF ethical decision-making environment builds on two axis: the horizontal x-axis measures moral drift as the degree to which an ethical choice is made with professional or self-serving intention. This axis recognizes that behavior that might be wrong in most cases *could* very well be absolutely necessary under some operational conditions. Within the language of the model, decisions made for operational reasons reflect low moral drift (L), while decisions made for personal or self-serving reasons reflect high-moral drift (H). Despite all operational conditions, low moral drift is always preferred.

The vertical y-axis measures the outcome of the ethical behavior and assumes that results will either be positive or negative. This model recognizes that negative outcomes may be a function of whether or not the behavior was detected. In most cases, a negative outcome is the result of the behavior being exposed, whereas a positive outcome occurs when no one is caught. Again, this model acknowledges the realities of the proposed SOF Ethical Truths and that operational success is often a reflection of whether or not a person gets caught. Therefore, the model recognizes that positive outcomes are better than negative outcomes. When the horizontal axis (moral drift) is combined with the vertical axis (operational outcome), four distinct categories of ethical outcomes emerge, and all have an impact on SOF culture and how the SOF Profession manages ethical decision-making.

The blue quadrant represents the best case for any SOF operational outcome as low moral drift combines with positive operational outcomes. Unfortunately, not all behavior stays in the blue quadrant. Sometimes, despite best intentions, SOF operations fall into the green quadrant. For such operations, the SOF practitioner acted out of professional necessity but the mission was unsuccessful in some way. Such cases are unfortunate and can be thought of as the "cost of doing business." In the highly complex world of Special Operations, success is never guaranteed. In such cases, retraining, as opposed to punishment, is often the remedy.

Representing the worst case, the red quadrant is where headlines emerge when the self-serving behavior reflective of high moral drift combines with the low operational outcomes as a result of getting caught in less than moral behavior. In most cases, SOF practitioners recognize that red-quadrant activity usually results in being removed from the profession. That said, sometimes red-quadrant examples become topics of contention in SOF units as Special Operators often disagree as to the operational necessity of the behavior as described by the third SOF Ethical Truth about "honest and frank consideration for the harsh realities of SOF environments and operational requirements."[24] Such cases tend to reflect the other harsh reality that distrust between tactical and strategic echelons underscores the fifth SOF Ethical Truth and perceptions of a "gap between the expectation and reality" of what SOF must do.[25]

Unfortunately, the real problem with ethical decision-making in SOF lies outside of the red quadrant. In fact, red-quadrant behavior might seem trivial as mpre than 70,000 people assigned to special operations units across the SOF Profession produce only a handful of newsworthy ethical problems. From this lens, the ethical failure rate of SOF is statistically indistinct from zero. It is also where arguments that SOF has no "systemic ethics problem" emerge.[26] However, the dual-axis nature of the model uncovers another quadrant where real problems with ethics often go undetected in SOF. The yellow quadrant represents the biggest blight on SOF behavior through a "culture of getting away with it" as the self-centered nature of behavior driven by moral drift remains hidden by positive outcomes and not getting caught.

If the yellow quadrant is accurate, then claims that SOF does not have an ethics problem may be misrepresenting reality. It is worth considering whether the yellow quadrant is a better mirror for SOF than handful of cases in the red quadrant. Furthermore, the yellow quadrant also reflects the reality that operational outcomes often outweigh ethical intention — statements such as "No need to worry about ethical misbehavior unless it affects the mission," suggest a tendency to value competence over character. This tendency is cleverly hidden and widely unrecognized by special operators who echo common tongue-in-cheek phrases such as, "If you ain't cheatin', you ain't tryin'!" The SOF Ethical Decision-making Environment Model frames the yellow quadrant clearly so that operators and leaders at all levels recognize that failing to talk about the yellow quadrant signals approval of "getting away with it" culture.

## CONCLUSION: RECOGNIZING THE DEPTH OF THE PROBLEM

With respect for human nature in mind, the model of the SOF ethical decision-making environment recognizes that humans have the capacity to limit or modify behavior when motivated to do so or when following the belief that there is a reasonable chance of not being held accountable. However, figure 03 underscores why the SOF Profession can no longer afford to ignore the yellow quadrant ethical behavior. Since ethical behavior is a function of two independent axes, the yellow quadrant can only exist when members of the SOF Profession demonstrate high moral drift. This means that the yellow quadrant, not the green, is the ultimate path to and source of all high-profile ethical failures in SOF.

The SOF Profession retains an obligation for continuing self-improvement and remains subject to many of the ethical challenges faced in other professions. The model of the SOF ethical decision-making environment helps illuminate the dangers of becoming fixated on red-quadrant behavior and ignoring the red-quadrant path. The SOF Ethical Truths, deliberately modeled after the SOF Truths, are intended to provide a guide that unites the SOF Profession from the team level to the nation's strategic-level leadership. The SOF Truths hold the profession together while simultaneously recognizing Special Operators are engaged in highly complex, strategically important, and extremely dangerous missions. Likewise, the SOF Ethical Truths and the models emphasize the needs of the nation over self and provide a much-needed, SOF-centric approach to improving the SOF Profession by promoting an environment of trust and respect.

Finally, the model of the SOF ethical decision-making environment provides a tool to facilitate education, training, and leadership at all levels of the SOF Profession. In distinguishing the difference between education and training, GEN Clarke, Commanding General, USSOCOM, provides the necessary distinction: "[w]e *train* staffs for what they need to know, Now [and] We *educate* Leaders for what they need to know [and how they need to think], for the future."[27] The model does both: it informs Special Operators on what drives ethical decision-making now, and it builds on over 2,500 years of critical thinking about the realities of human nature, moral drift, and moral injury to educate our forces on how to make better ethical decisions in the future.

Furthermore, the model provides a meaningful leadership tool for SOF professionals at all levels to develop subordinates on how to make their own ethical decisions better, while also providing a necessary vocabulary for stimulating trust throughout the inherently joint nature of the SOF Profession. Yellow quadrant behaviors and red quadrant outcomes are a problem common to us all, and understanding the SOF ethical decision-making environment helps to get us all on the same map. **SW**

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# ALL TRAINING IS ETHICS TRAINING

## BY MAJOR BART KENNEDY

When we talk about ethics in special operations forces there typically follows a common series of questions: How do we teach ethics? Can we? If a service member comes to SOF at 22 years old or older, are they not fully formed already? These are certainly valid questions to ask. After all, we only select and assess adults with a whole range of formative experiences behind them. But we do take up the task of training a whole new set of skills once that person is assessed and selected, a process which continues throughout a career in SOF as they develop specialized skills honed through training and military education courses. Integral, not incidental, to this process is a process of ethical formation. The answer, in the end, is not to "do ethics training," but instead to recognize that we are already in the business

of ethical formation and seek to understand the how and why of what we already do.

To understand our ethics, we can first ask a simple question: What does it mean to be a good Green Beret? We can derive some answers from official documents, such as professional requirements or expectations of a specific commander. But beyond those things, each member of the community holds their own concept of what it means to be a good member of that same community, whether they can completely voice it or not. We have a whole series of expectations for the internal and external characteristics of our peers.

This understanding of what it means to be a member of the community is elaborated on by the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, who seeks to understand how we could understand ethics considering modern challenges. Drawing on earlier definitions from Aristotle and others, he recognized that we develop activities over time, and within those activities we not only understood the external goods, the obvious things we gain like money, physical fitness, etc., but also internal

goods. These internal goods are less obvious: we place children into sports not just to develop physically or learn a game but also to get better at overcoming adversity and develop the ability to work with others.

MacIntyre defines certain complex activities by which we can understand our own development as "practices." He defines them in this way:

*By a "practice" I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.*[01]

What we note here is that a true practice has standards of excellence which define and help bracket the practice, and also in seeking to meet these standards the people within them develop as people. And over time, the practice grows and what we learn about it and about ourselves as

participants also grow. This is true on the individual level (we can become say, better baseball players over time) and on the level of the practice itself (new chess strategies are developed, new tournaments and ways to bring competitors together, etc.).

So, practices develop over time, and within them they have narratives and traditions. Narratives are a key part of how we understand ourselves. We are storytelling animals who find ourselves in a specific point in history: we are a member of this nation, this army, this family, etc. We learn the narratives of the things around us and develop our own in order to understand the history of how we got here, how we learned the things we know, how we learned from our mistakes, etc. In understanding yourself as part of a practice, you are positioned in a particular historical situation, and the way in which you place yourself within that, your own narrative within your practice.

To take another example, to really understand yourself as a football player, you must understand the development of the game over time and what form the game takes now. If you tried to play as if it were the 1970s, you would not be a good player: the rules change over time, the equipment allows for a different way of playing, the improvements in physical fitness all make for a game that has developed in a particular way. But understanding what came before is key to your knowledge of your practice.

Moreover, there is always an internal debate within a practice about what it means to participate in it. But, the presence of a contentious debate about narratives (what it means to be a good sailor or baseball player or in this case, a Green Beret) does not signify a problem, rather it is a normal part of a living tradition. "What constitutes a tradition," MacIntyre says, "is a conflict of interpretations of that tradition."[02] We can and should continue to debate what it means to be a Green Beret, and conflicts about our traditions and what they mean are important and should be carried on, and important work has been done in this area.[03]

We are engaged in the business



01

of a practice. In taking only one part of our SOF practice, that of Green Berets, we can look at how we this understanding of practice, narrative and tradition can help us to understand the questions of ethics.

So, what does it mean to be a good Green Beret? That is the question that we are constantly engaged in within the community. Everything we do as members of the community is, deliberately or not, answering that question. Who we recognize, promote, punish, etc. all are contributing to the development of the practice. The ways that we train (or fail to) also are a part of our participation in the practice. In all these efforts we are seeking standards of excellence and to better fulfill (and define) the demands of our practice.

Another way of understanding it in a colloquial term is as our "culture." While this term does not mean the same thing as practice as defined by MacIntyre, it is a useful analogy. If you have a culture in your unit of skirting financial regulations, then you reinforce to new members who are learning what it means to be a member of your unit that this is normal. Moreover, being a good member of the unit means you do those things. But this is a bad tradition, a way in which we would misunderstand what it means to be a member of our particular practice: in the end, a practice should make you a better person, it should expand who you are and pro-

vide those internal and external goods.

We occupy a position within a complex series of narratives which connect us to each of those things and provide us the context for our lives and our actions. Each new Green Beret finds themselves a part of the SOF story, and places themselves, perhaps unconsciously but frequently with intent, as a part of a series of narratives: I am a member of this team, with photos on the wall telling the stories of those who came before me and senior members of the team regaling me with tales of past glories on and off the battlefield; I am a member of a unit with a history; I am a member of United States Special Operations, an organization with a storied past and global renown. All of these barely cover the complexity of the narratives in which an operator situates themselves. Individuals, teams, battalions and groups all have narratives. Some are true, some are not, some are somewhere in between. They either build the practice and help people understand standards of excellence and the way in which we become better Green Berets, or they can take us further from excellence.

These narratives that we are exposed to develop our understanding of our role as a Green Beret, and the way we should fulfill it. For an example, at some point we learn how we "should" interact with non-SOF members of the military. It may be spoken or unspoken. It will be

learned in training via the instructors they have and how they inculcate new members, or by witnessing the respect or condescension shown to non-SOF by their first teammates, or by emulating other SOF operators they respect. They will be performing what they have learned and come to believe is their expected role as a SOF operator.

The idea that soldiers are reliant on narratives to understand their role is not a new one. Both Plato[04] and remember (and choose to forget) and the things we aspire to: these are the things that develop the practice for better or for worse. Each of us is participating in the moral education that is inherent to the day-to-day of being in SOF. The story of each operator plays out in conjunction with the story that they tell and are told about what it means to be a Green Beret. These things all inform our decision making and influence our understanding of right and wrong within the the training is obviously contradictory to the experience of those receiving it.

This is not a simple task, and it would be an illusion to think that we will root out every bad tradition or narrative at every level. But it is essential to recognize that everything we do, from teaching target discrimination to who we pick to be the paying agent, is also an exercise in moral education. It remains a responsibility for leaders at every level to develop the practice by supporting narratives which reinforce

## IF YOU HAVE A CULTURE IN YOUR UNIT OF SKIRTING FINANCIAL REGULATIONS, THEN YOU REINFORCE TO NEW MEMBERS WHO ARE LEARNING WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A MEMBER OF YOUR UNIT THAT THIS IS NORMAL. MOREOVER, BEING A GOOD MEMBER OF THE UNIT MEANS YOU DO THOSE THINGS.

Aristotle[05] examined the relationship of societies to their guardians and philosophized on different approaches to the best way to educate soldiers. While they came to different conclusions on which way was best, they agreed that it came down to education, or to put it another way, in the framing of ethical narratives. The common idea is that it was critical to be clear on what honor and excellence meant, and to keep a close watch on who and what was honored and what was reinforced. This was not only theory, the Roman Republic had clear norms about honor and how behavior was reinforced in the early legions. Some scholars of civil-military relations have even argued that it was the collapse of these systems of norms of honor and moral education that lead to the downfall of the Republic.[06]

Where all of this leads to is the question of our ethics. The nature of practice and the constituent elements of narratives and tradition tell us that is deep-seated and long-held narratives about what it means to be a member of our community, or a member of a particular unit, that inform our professional ethics. The stories we tell context we live and work.

A lot of things factor into this, things that we take for granted because they are not formalized but are lived experience or passed down in a kind of oral tradition from Team Sergeant to new team member, or from senior members to junior ones. What it means to bend or break military rules, what it means to be "special," how to conduct oneself on and off the battlefield. And the ways in which each operator participates in sustaining narratives is significant to their moral development and the development of the practice.

We can and perhaps should conduct training blocks on ethics and look at vignettes and talk about them. This is a valuable effort because when conducted with candor, those different understandings about what it means to be a good member of the community will come to light and can be discussed. However, narrative and tradition mean that both context and content matter. We must be particularly careful about "ethics training," for if it is obviously out of line with the lived experience of those hearing it, then it will only serve to reinforce an existing bad narrative if ethical behavior and thinking critically about all the things we do and what narratives those things support. Which traditions do we foster? Which malignant traditions do we allow to continue? If it seems too hard to root out, it may be because we have allowed them to develop for a long time.

In the end, our ethical problems cannot be distilled down to systemic problems or a lack thereof, but they are the product of a complex set of stories we tell ourselves about who we are and what it means to be a member of our community. These are built every day in the actions we take or fail to take. Everything we do makes us who we are, and we cannot run from it if taking a serious look at ourselves shows us things that we do not want to see. **SW**

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# EXERCISE ROUTINES IN THE NEW YEAR

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Beginning a workout regime in the new year can be a great way to start, but keeping in mind the intensity, type, and motivation behind the routine you have planned will be critical to successful results and injury prevention. Choosing an exercise program that will incorporate goals of improved postural strength, core strength, overall mobility, adherence and with proper dietary support will enhance your potential success. In this article we will provide exercise progression suggestions, mobility exercises, dietary information and strategies to increase adherence/performance to your plan for the new year.

Within the purely physical realm any exercise routine should begin with proper progression in mind. Beginning a routine with volume or intensity that is too high will result in increased risk of injury. Exercise selection is important to success and adherence to your plan. To e build of your plan, start with a "non-traditional" training protocol. Instead of building your plan around traditional resistance training exercises consider utilizing training with sandbags and other carry implements such as kettlebells, dumbbells, medicine balls, sand balls or weighted vests. Implementing exercise such as sandbag carries for time or distance, kettlebell or dumbbell farmers walk for time or distance, fork carries/waiters walk/shoulder loaded walks for time or distance will help improve your postural, core and grip strength preparing you for future traditional loaded movements suck as squats/deadlift/olympic lifts/rows/presses. Being able to master postural, grip and core strength will provide a base for your body to excel within all movements in your routine as you adapt and progress. Improving simple tasks like walking and carrying weight will always make the more complex tasks like deadlifting easier to master. The progression of intensity/volume of your routine will also dictate how successful you will be. When beginning an exercise routine, a good goal is start out undershooting how much you think you can do the first couple of weeks and slowly increasing weight loaded and how many reps/sets you complete. "You can always add more weight or reps, but you can't un-hurt yourself." Generally starting with 2-3 sets of 8-12 repetitions or 30-45 seconds of work would be good guideline with the weight loaded becoming difficult the last two reps of the movement or the last 10-15 seconds of a carry. Including additional core strengthening exercises will produce benefits to strength gains. Inserting core stability exercises such as front/side planks, palloff press, overhead palloff press, ab wheel, laying straight leg holds/raises, Single and double leg hip bridges and stability ball rollouts. While building your plan consider training 2-4 times a week depending on your current level of activity and make sure to give yourself 24-48 hours of rest between days of activity.

With endurance training such as running, rucking, biking, stair climbing or swimming the same principles hold true as with any resistance training. Implementing a proper progression is critical to improving performance and preventing injury. The modality of your endurance training should be chosen based off what you are training to achieve. If you need to improve running, the best way to help that goal is to include running into your routine. The same is true of any endurance training, the inclusion of that specific exercise is key. With that in mind, also plan to include cross training, running is essential to run performance but pounding pavement with too much volume can result in injury. So, plan to include a day or two of non-impact exercise such as biking or swimming to mitigate injury. Interval exercise is a good starting point. For many people, performing an endurance exercise for a specific amount of time rather than distance is helpful when starting a new training plan. Endurance exercise for a prescribed distance but varied intensity through a continuous movement pattern can provide a good starting point.

With any exercise routine, it is important to include a component of mobility work. The key areas most have issues with are the hips, ankles and back. Moving in an appropriate range of motion pain-free is important to performance improvements along with maintaining joint health while increasing activity. Some important exercises to include target these areas by increasing range of motion and teach the body how to activate the appropriate muscle groups for the movements enquired. Exercises to activate the glutes such as fire hydrants/birddogs/hip circles/hip bridges are great for producing improved results in your exercise regimen. Ankle mobility exercises such as ankle rocking and banded ankle mobility work will allow you to squat down to depth and run more efficiently. Thoracic mobility exercise such as rib rolls will provide the ability to maintain appropriate postural control in all movements providing an enhanced performance ability. Those exercises along with a proper soft tissue recovery routine that includes foam rolling, active stretching and static stretching will serve to prepare you for a workout or allow you to recover after completing a day of exercise.

As you consider your exercise routine keep in mind the ability to stick to that plan is an important mental process. There are a couple of things to consider as you start. The first is: Are you actually ready to make a change? Put simply if someone isn't ready for change or hasn't mentally prepared for it, change

doesn't happen. So, as you take a moment and reflect on where you are as you prepare for 2022 it may be helpful to consider where you are. Obviously, you are aware of a change you want made, which means you have moved past precontemplative to contemplative. But have you fully committed to the change and prepared for it? Preparation means taking into consideration what obstacles there are to making the change, planning how it fits into your life in a realistic way and making sure you have the materials for the change (money, resources, time, support).

A couple key tips along the way as you move into action:

• Having a plan makes your initial actions easy. It's better to work out for 5 minutes every day than working out for an hour one day and being too sore to work out the next. Build actions slowly and reasonably.

• Create initial actions that are so easy it's almost impossible or unreasonable NOT to do them.

• You will relapse. When you try to create change there will be a day you mess it up. This is okay, just let it be one day and not two days.

• When you relapse take a moment to reconsider your plan and know why the relapse occurred. If this happens again, what changes could you make where you still get your new habit in?

• Don't tell everyone about your change. I know this seems counter to the normal action of announcing your goals but when we talk about our goals we get an endorphin rush without actually doing anything. Stop talking and start doing.

Behavior change is hard. Creating lasting change in your life is incredibly hard. So take the time before you embark on the adventure to plan properly. You will learn a lot about yourself during this journey. But once you have made one change you will only get better at making future changes.

Now that you have your plan and an idea of how to support that plan with a positive mental process adding in the support of your dietary needs will keep your body and mind fueled for the year ahead. Adding the appropriate amount of carbs, fats and protein into your diet will help you increase your performance throughout your training plan and recover from the training itself. The amounts of each of those macronutrients will depend on your goals much like your volume and intensity of training. Think about including up to 30-60g of CHO (carbohydrates) for pre-training nutrition (30-60 minutes prior to training) along with hydrating during the day with water. Spreading meals throughout the day to maintain your caloric intake and not overloading one meal will help you remain fed for training and help you recover. Including fresh whole food such as vegetables (green leafy vegetables, carrots, etc.), lean protein (chicken, fish), and healthy fats (omega 3) will allow your training to be utilized to its best. Some of the best advice to maintain health by using dietary means is not just what to eat but what to avoid including in your diet. Examples of foods that will negatively impact training and recovery when consumed in high amounts are high sugar foods (candy, desserts) and alcohol. These foods will not only impact your body composition but most importantly will inhibit your ability to recovery from training and promote inflammation. Pay attention to what you put in your body and when, to make sure your training will meet your ultimate goals. **SW**

## SAMPLE 4 DAY TRAINING PLAN

**Warm-Up Routine:**
1. Foam Roll Following Areas:
    a. Gluts/Hamstrings/Calf/Quadriceps/Upper & Lower Back/Lats
    b. Roll between 30-45 seconds each area
    c. Never over bone or joint just the muscle
2. Active Warm-Up
    a. Walking Lunge and Reach ................. 2 Sets of 10 Yards
    b. Walking Quad Stretch and Knee Hug. 2 Sets of 10 Yards
    c. Lateral Slide........................................ 2 Sets of 10 Yards
    d. Reverse Lunge with Twist.................. 2 Sets of 10 Yards
    e. Hip Bridges........................................ 2 Sets of 10 Reps
    f. Fire Hydrants ..................................... 2 Sets of 10 Reps
    g. High Knees & Butt Kicks .................... 2 Sets of 10 Yards

**Cool-Down Routine:**
1. Foam Roll Following Areas:
    a. Gluts/Hamstrings/Calf/Quadriceps/Upper & Lower Back/Lats
    b. Roll between 30-45 seconds each area
    c. Never over bone or joint just the muscle
2. Stretch (Hold each stretch 30-45 seconds or until relaxed)
    a. Hamstring
    b. Quad
    c. Calf
    d. Pecs
    e. Hang and Stretch from Bar

### DAY 1
Superset exercises in each circuit together until down with Circuit 1 and then start Circuit 2:

**Circuit 1**
KB/DB Farmers Walk ..........2-3 Sets of 30-45 Seconds of Walking
Sandbag Bear Hug Carry.....2-3 Sets of 30-45 Seconds of Walking
Front/Side Plank .................2-3 Sets of 30-45 Seconds
Palloff Press ........................2-3 Sets of 8-12 Reps
**Circuit 2**
Squat ..................................2-3 Sets of 8-12 Reps
Banded Leg Curls ................2-3 Sets of 8-12 Reps
Sandbag Bent Over Row .....2-3 Sets of 8-12 Reps
Sandbag Curl to Overhead Press .....2-3 Sets of 8-12 Reps

### DAY 2:
Interval Run/Bike...........................5-10 Sets of 1-2 minutes
Rest 1-2 minutes between sets

### DAY 3
Superset exercises in each circuit together until down with Circuit 1 and then start Circuit 2:
**Circuit 1**
Sandbag on Shoulder ......... 2-3 Sets of 30-45 Seconds of Walking
KB/DB Waiters Walk ........... 2-3 Sets of 30-45 Seconds of Walking
Ab Wheel or Stability Ball Rollout..2-3 Sets of 8-12 Reps
Overhead Palloff Press ...................2-3 Sets of 8-12 Reps
**Circuit 2**
KB Sumo Deadlift............................2-3 Sets of 8-12 Reps
Double Leg Hip Bridge ...................2-3 Sets of 8-12 Reps
DB/KB 1 Arm Row ...........................2-3 Sets of 8-12 Reps
Weighted Vest Pushups .................2-3 Sets of 8-12 Reps

### DAY 4:
Interval Run/Swim/Bike ................5-10 Sets of 1-2 minutes
Rest 1-2 minutes between sets

**SPECIAL FORCES ASSESSMENT AND SELECTION | FORT BRAGG, NORTH CAROLINA**



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