

Macro-Ethics and Tactical

Capt. Ryan Jodoi, an unmanned aerial vehicle pilot, flies an MQ-9 Reaper while Airman 1st Class Patrick Snyder controls a full motion video camera at Kandahar Air Base, Afghanistan, 13 March 2009.

(U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. James L. Harper Jr., AFCENT Combat Camera)

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Commanders and leaders must often make decisions the moral correctness and strategic outcome of which are difficult to calculate. Consider the *strategic corporal*, a relatively new and inexperienced noncommissioned officer, in contrast to the *tactical general*, an experienced leader who through technology can control, or even micromanage, events on the battlefield that traditionally were left to leaders much closer to the action. Inherent in both positions, as they have evolved, is great strategic risk.

Strategic corporals make tactical decisions that can have far-reaching strategic consequences. On the other hand, high-level leaders, through technology, can directly affect tactical situations without sufficient consideration of the strategic implications of these actions.

At any level, as Army leaders we cannot let our strategic acumen atrophy. Instead, we must become more sophisticated in our decision-making processes, especially when it comes to incorporating strategic-level ethics that directly impact mission success or failure.

Strategic-level ethics—or *macro-ethics*—takes into account the structure of ethical decision making as a whole. Macro-ethics, like macroeconomics, looks not at the individual agent but at the overall effect of ethical decisions. In other words, macro-ethics looks beyond relatively black-and-white ethics of specific situations or individual decisions and takes into consideration the overall strategic-level ethical climate.

Granted, it is important for individuals to make ethical decisions in their personal situations because little good can come from immoral behavior at any level. However, high-level leaders also need to make morally

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Decision Making

driven macro-ethical decisions because the American people expect, and our military profession demands, that military professionals make military decisions based on proper moral judgment, taking into consideration the overall end state desired at tactical and strategic levels.

As ethicist Don Snider writes,

To be sure, all of our forces use billions of dollars of technology, but it is all at the beck and call of a human operator or commander who uses discretionary moral judgments to apply that military power. That is the art of being a military professional, making repetitive discretionary judgments often scores of times a day that are both effective militarily and within the moral norms expected by the military's client—the American people.¹

In making these discretionary moral judgments, Army leaders must take into consideration complexity since understanding and visualizing the complex environment—all the conditions, circumstances, and influences that bear on a commander's decisions—are essential to proper macro-ethical decisions.

In a decision process guided by macro-ethical concerns, actions at any level can be considered morally prohibited, morally permissible, or morally dubious. Morally prohibited actions are always unethical and wrong; they should be considered unacceptable. However, the moral implications of actions resulting from military decisions are harder to analyze because their effects can cross the levels of war. Sometimes morally permissible actions on the tactical level have morally prohibited or morally dubious outcomes on a complex strategic level. This means morally permissible tactical actions that have morally prohibited strategic outcomes should be considered unacceptable. Additionally, sometimes morally dubious actions on the tactical level produce desired strategic outcomes that are morally permissible. Actions contemplated from an ethical standpoint require careful consideration and perhaps new analytical tools to guide the process.

One helpful tool for guiding macro-ethical decision making is known as the *Cynefin Framework*, a problem-solving tool developed by David J. Snowden and

others for business. Understanding complexity through the Cynefin Framework is not the only way to make macro-ethical decisions. It is, however, a way.

This paper will examine the Cynefin Framework and its usefulness to ethical decision making for military leaders. It will then examine two historical military situations in which understanding or misunderstanding a complex environment led to good or poor tactical decisions with subsequent good or poor strategic outcomes. Then it will apply these insights to the analyze the macro-ethics of the tactical use of drones in current operations. These case studies will illuminate the fact that morally dubious actions may produce desired strategic effects that are morally permissible. They will also show how morally permissible actions at the tactical level can have morally undesirable effects on a complex strategic level.

A Sense-Making Framework for Morally Complex Decisions

According to David J. Snowden and Mary E. Boone, in their 2007 article "A Leader's Framework for Decision Making," the Cynefin Framework "helps leaders determine the prevailing operative context so that they can make appropriate choices."² This framework strives to make sense of the prevailing environment. In a 2011 video posted at a website called *Cognitive Edge Network*, Snowden places decision-making models in two groups: categorization models and sense-making models.³ According to Snowden, in a categorization model, the framework precedes the data. In a sense-making model, the data precedes the framework.

This distinction is useful for ethical decision making. Many accuse moral analytical systems of being too narrow in that they do not account for varied and new situations. This is because the analytical frameworks seem to precede the data, or in the case of ethics, the new and unique situations. In complex situations, it may be better to adopt an ethical framework to meet the situation.

Nevertheless, it is important to point out that this is not situational ethics *per se*. Morally prohibited actions

A U.S. Air Force MQ-9 Reaper from the 62nd Expeditionary Reconnaissance Squadron takes off from Kandahar Air Base, Afghanistan, 13 March 2009. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. James L. Harper Jr., AFCEnt Combat Camera)

remain prohibited and unacceptable regardless of the situation or the outcome. The idea behind macro-ethics is to determine whether a morally permissible or even a morally dubious action will produce a morally permissible outcome on a strategic level.

To help clarify the distinction between morally permissible and morally dubious actions, we should establish the meaning of *dubious*. *Merriam-Webster.com* provides two definitions. For the purposes of this paper, the second definition, “unsettled in opinion,” is useful since it highlights that not all actions can or should be considered *prima facie* moral or immoral.⁴ That is, there are differences of opinion on the morality of many matters; these we call “grey areas.”

For example, there are differences of opinion regarding strategic bombing in disputing whether it is ever morally permissible to bomb cities where one is certain there will be civilian casualties. During the period between World War I and World War II, many considered the bombing of cities permissible. Everything that added to a nation’s capacity to wage war was considered a legitimate target, much of which was often located in large urban and industrialized areas. The bombing of these targets would result in a shorter war, the argument went, which was a desired, and morally permissible, strategic outcome. In some camps, this idea remained widely accepted beyond World War II. Nevertheless, there was, and remains, considerable disagreement as to the moral permissibility of bombing cities. It is a morally dubious tactic. Notwithstanding, a shorter war still is considered a desirable, and morally acceptable, outcome.

Application to the ethics of tactical decisions. The Cynefin Framework can give high-level military leaders a tool for deciding when or whether a tactic—such as the bombing of cities for strategic purposes—is morally permissible, morally dubious, or morally prohibited. Using this framework can help leaders make a morally acceptable decision.

The Cynefin Framework was developed to help executives make decisions in complex business situations. In this paper, I propose applying the model for ethical decision making in military operations.

Contexts for decision making. Snowden defines the Cynefin Framework using five contexts, also called domains: obvious (originally called *simple* in the 2007 article), complicated, complex, chaotic, and disorder.⁵

(In the Cynefin Framework, *complicated* and *complex* are used differently; they are not synonyms.)

According to Snowden and Boone, obvious and complicated contexts, “assume an ordered universe, where cause-and-effect relationships are perceptible, and right answers can be determined based on the facts.”⁶ An obvious context is relatively simple; things are as they appear. To make decisions in an obvious context, a leader’s job is to sense, *categorize*, and then respond.⁷ There is a right answer.

Many ethical decisions fall under an obvious context. For example, the decision whether to kill enemy prisoners is an ethical decision in an obvious context. Killing unarmed prisoners violates any number of laws and moral codes. It is a morally prohibited act. The decision to kill in self-defense, however, is morally permissible. Again, the decision is simple. One senses the situation, categorizes it (based on the rule that killing is permissible in self-defense), and responds appropriately.

Within a complicated context, the situation is slightly different. There may be more than one right answer. To make decisions in a complicated context, leaders sense, *analyze*, and then respond.⁸ In this context, leaders use personal knowledge and experience as well as subject matter expertise to analyze the situation and come to a decision. For example, military decisions in a complicated context may involve obtaining legal analysis, whereupon leaders base their decisions on interpretation of laws. By way of illustration, the decision to target a religious site may be a legal decision based on the rules of engagement (ROE). If an enemy operates from a religious site, under the prevailing ROE that site may lose its status and becomes a legal, and morally permissible, target. Conducting operations against the target would be thus legally acceptable. However, the decision is not simple; it involves analysis. It is complicated. The decision to treat such a site as a target may not be straightforward. Other factors may emerge, after careful consideration, that outweigh on moral grounds purely legal justification for attacking the site.

This illustrates that not all legal acts are morally permissible, which means decision makers should not regard the results of some legal acts as being acceptable. Legality and morality get tangled.

In the article “Law and Ethics in Command Decision-Making,” A. Edward Major discusses the

complex ethical dimensions behind a decision to conduct the mission to kill Osama bin Laden:

Many question whether the special mission for Osama bin-Laden into Abbottabad, Pakistan, was legal under international law. Yet Americans largely agree it was morally right, whether or not it met the standards of international law. The law on the subject is conflicted, depending on whether one focuses on violations of sovereign territoriality or the significance of Osama bin-Laden and his finding sanctuary in Pakistan. From the standpoint of law, both arguments are compelling—but the majority of Americans, to put it simply, do not care; the morally right necessity of eliminating bin-Laden trumped any esoteric question of legality.⁹

However, setting aside the bin Laden example, Major also concludes that what is legally permissible is not always morally permissible: “The consideration of what may lawfully be done does not consider other relevancies of morality, diplomacy, politics, our own public opinion, and relations with the host population.”¹⁰

These points raise concerns for the unknown or unanticipated perils that arise from the adverse consequences of macro-ethical decisions. For example, what if the legally questionable mission to capture bin Laden had failed? What if it had been a catastrophic failure involving significant friendly casualties, as did the 1979 “Desert One” hostage rescue mission in Iran during the Carter Administration?

Also, obvious and complicated contexts (which are considered ordered), tend to gravitate toward complexity (which is unordered, but not chaotic), especially when applied to war, national security, and international relations. Consequently, there is an inherent danger for decision makers to oversimplify situations and contemplated solutions.

The Cynefin Framework addresses these difficulties. Snowden says failure to recognize a situation’s context may result in disorder.¹¹ He refers to disorder as “not knowing which space you are in.”¹² He goes on to state that this is the place “where we are most of the time” because people “interpret each situation according to their preference for action.”¹³ Typically, a certain blindness is caused by our preferences and our experiences.

The cliff between order and chaos. Therein lies a danger because according to Snowden, there is a “cliff” between the ordered domains (including obvious and complicated) and chaos.¹⁴ Chaos may result from either deliberate unethical behavior or failure to recognize complicated or complex situations. In the latter cause, complacency may cause one to oversimplify and misinterpret a problem causing an already complicated situation to become chaotic. Thus, failure to understand how complicated a military problem is may lead to chaos and moral failure.

Irrespective, Snowden warns, once one falls into chaos, it is difficult to recover. He concludes “One should, therefore, manage in the complicated and complex spaces to avoid the cliff.”¹⁵

Morally permissible strategic outcomes. Although moral chaos is bad, moral complexity is not necessarily bad as long as military leaders understand the situation and apply an acceptable macro-ethical solution. This is where macro-ethics can use the Cynefin Framework for making ethical military decisions leading to desirable strategic outcomes that are morally acceptable.

Within the Cynefin Framework, Snowden considers complex and chaotic contexts unordered: “there is no immediate apparent relationship between cause and effect.”¹⁶ Snowden defines a complex context as a place where “cause and effect are only obvious in hindsight, with unpredictable emergent outcomes.”¹⁷

Making decisions in a complex context calls for leaders to probe, sense, and respond in order to discover an emergent practice.¹⁸ Of these three actions, the key to success in a complex context is effective probing, Snowden asserts.¹⁹ He defines probing as conducting “safe-to-fail experiments” (not fail-safe experiments).²⁰ If a solution does not work, leaders should get rid of it. If it succeeds, they should amplify it.

This approach may be fine for business decision making. Nevertheless, how can military leaders apply it to ethics? How do leaders conduct probing ethically?

Before military leaders probe a situation to discover solutions, they must determine what is morally required. They must ask what the next step should be. The actions of then Maj. Gen. David H. Petraeus in Mosul, Iraq from 2003 to 2004 illustrate how effective probing of a complex situation led to an acceptable solution. Kirsten Lundberg reports that as commander of the 101st Airborne Division, Petraeus determined that he had a

moral obligation based on the Geneva Convention to establish the “security and well-being of the Iraqi people in his area of responsibility.”²¹ He based his actions—some of which could have been considered morally dubious—on this moral obligation, and he succeeded in establishing security in a city torn by violence.

After probing, a leader should ask what is morally permissible *and* determine based on emergent data whether the morally permissible actions identified will lead to the strategic goal. This may require some trial and error.

Incidents from Iraq in 2004 provide more examples. Then Lt. Col. Nathan Sassaman used high-handed methods such as physical coercion and intimidation to extract information from or to punish Iraqi detainees. Soldiers under Sassaman’s command forced two Iraqi civilian detainees off a bridge, which led to one’s death by drowning. *New York Times* writer Dexter Filkins describes how Sassaman established a very aggressive and abusive command environment with regard to the treatment of prisoners that, once exposed by the news media, proved counterproductive to the strategic objectives of Operation Iraqi Freedom.²²

Compare these actions with the methods employed by then Col. Dana Pittard. As commander of the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, in Iraq in 2004, Pittard determined that U.S. forces could not kill their way out of difficult situations. Although his troops had permission to use high-handed methods, Pittard determined that those methods, although morally permissible on a tactical level, would have an adverse effect strategically.²³ He used a forceful but less lethal and less threatening approach with civilians, which proved effective in supporting strategic goals.

The objective of using a framework for ethical decision making. The bottom line is that leaders should use a framework to assess what strategic effects tactical

actions are having, including the second- and third-order effects of morally permissible or morally dubious actions. Once a leader commits to a morally permissible or morally dubious action, and that action produces desired strategic results, the leader should amplify the results. If it does not, stop it. Try a different probe.

This is not situational or utilitarian ethics. Actions that are morally prohibited remain prohibited regardless of the situation or the strategic outcome. Instead, macro-ethics can use the Cynefin Framework to focus on attempting to make a decision within the boundaries of morally permissible or morally dubious actions. Moreover, the only acceptable decisions are those whose actions produce a desired and morally permissible strategic outcome.

Strategic-level ethics, at the highest decision-making levels, have a broad scope. Ending hostilities in an honorable, just, and timely manner is a broad strategic goal. Leaders must avoid morally permissible or morally dubious actions that, on a strategic level, would prolong the conflict or delegitimize our narrative (honor and justice). Conversely, it would be acceptable for leaders to employ morally dubious tactical actions in addition to morally permissible actions if they would result in an honorable, just, and timely cessation of hostilities.

First Case Study: Operation Linebacker

An example of a morally dubious tactical decision having morally desirable strategic results that occurred during the Vietnam War is Operation Linebacker II. To force the North Vietnamese back to the Paris peace talks and convince the South Vietnamese government of U.S. resolve, in December 1972, President Nixon ordered the largest bombing of North Vietnam since the beginning of the Vietnam War. According to David L. Anderson, it was a morally dubious tactical action that remains as controversial now as it was then.²⁴ Yet, Nixon desired a morally permissible strategic outcome. He wanted to conclude the war with honor and justice, and in a timely manner. Anderson describes the situation:

The Nixon administration was exasperated with both Hanoi and Saigon, and the bombing can be seen as a message to both. Washington wanted the DRV [Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the communist North, with its capital in Hanoi] to sign the October agreement

Photo by Sgt. Matthew Acosta, 22nd MPAD



Army Col. Dana Pittard talks with local policemen about the security issues at the Iraqi election poll sites, 30 January 2005.

and wanted the RVN [Republic of Vietnam, the South, with its capital in Saigon] to cease being obstructionist. To both sides Nixon was saying that the United States remained strong and willing to use forceful action even as it was showing a readiness to compromise.²⁵

It worked. Unlike previous bombing campaigns on limited and highly restricted targets, which had little effect on the North Vietnamese, Operation Linebacker II compelled them to return to the talks and sign a cease-fire.

One can view the earlier limited bombing campaigns from a Cynefin Framework perspective as ineffective probes. The expanded bombing can be considered another probe, which proved effective even when the bombing involved morally dubious, but not prohibited, targeting. The action had a morally acceptable strategic result: peace talks. Whether the final peace agreement held for more than a few years is moot. The reluctance of the parties involved to adhere to their ends of the agreement (nonaggression by the North and military support for the South by the United States) does not negate the fact that the bombing campaign had the desired strategic effect. The desired strategic outcome, peace talks, was a morally acceptable and desirable goal. It was in accord with the wishes of the American people. In this instance, Nixon fulfilled his moral obligation as a leader.

Second Case Study: The Atomic Bombing of Japan

The Cynefin Framework is useful to analyze another complex case study that involves macro-ethics: the use of atomic weapons against Japan during World War II. In contrast to Operation Linebacker II, this case study results in remarkably different conclusions.

The use of atomic weapons against largely civilian targets is a morally dubious action at best. Many consider it morally prohibited. For the sake of argument in this article, let us consider it morally dubious. Moral considerations aside, the Truman Administration seemed to base its decision in what the Cynefin Framework would call an ordered-obvious domain. Consequently, as a world, we almost fell over a cliff into chaos.

In *Decision to Drop the Atomic Bomb: Hiroshima and Nagasaki: August 1945*, Dennis Wainstock writes, “The loss of Japanese lives and the morality of dropping the atomic bombs apparently did not enter into Truman’s

decision.”²⁶ According to Wainstock, Americans were desensitized by previous bombing campaigns against German and Japanese cities and provoked by racist propaganda. One result was Truman’s decision to drop the bombs had little ethical consideration either tactically or strategically.²⁷ Truman also apparently assumed that the only way to avert a bloody invasion was by using atomic weapons. Wainstock asserts that this proved to be a false assumption and a convenient denial of facts.²⁸ If the above is true, Truman decided to use atomic weapons based on the simple assumption that killing the enemy, whether civilian or not, was the shortest and best way to victory.

Truman’s moral judgment also may have been clouded by concern over the possibility of a Soviet entry into the war. Tsuyoshi Hasegawa writes, “Truman was in a hurry. He was aware that the race was on between the atomic bomb and Soviet entry into the war. That was why he concocted the story of Japan’s ‘prompt rejection’ of the Potsdam Proclamation as the justification for the atomic bomb ...”²⁹

Considerable debate continues to surround this interpretation of events in World War II. However, according to some historians, Japan already was beaten before the United States used the atomic bombs. According to Wainstock, “Long before the dropping of the bombs, Japan’s leaders had decided to surrender and were taking preliminary steps to that end, as U.S. leaders knew from naval intelligence interception of Japan’s top-secret codes.”³⁰ Wainstock concludes,

If the United States had given Japan conditional surrender terms, including retention of the emperor, at the war’s outset, Japan would probably have surrendered sometime in the spring or early summer of 1945, if not sooner. This would have saved countless lives, avoided the horrible destruction of many of Japan’s cities, and prevented Soviet expansion in East Asia. Most important, it would have avoided the need to plan for an invasion or to drop the atomic bombs. As it was, the dropping of the bombs only hastened the surrender of an already defeated enemy.³¹

This is a startling analysis. If accurate, the world’s leaders, especially members of the Truman Administration, failed to consider the overarching strategic effects of several morally dubious actions. By



Atomic cloud over Nagasaki from Koyagi-jima, 9 August 1945.

ignoring several indicators of likely negative second- and third-order effects, such as the proliferation of atomic weapons, the dehumanization of the Japanese people, and the expansion of the Soviet Union into East Asia, the Truman Administration pushed a complex situation over the cliff into chaos.

Contemporary Macro-ethical Analysis: Drones

Are we falling into a similar trap as we prosecute the war on terrorism? Are we attempting to answer complex questions with simple answers? In our just endeavor to defeat global terrorism, are we failing to see adverse second- and third-order effects of our tactical actions? Consider our use of drones.

Use of drones is an example of a morally permissible tactical action that is producing a morally undesirable strategic outcome. Once again, it seems as if we are attempting to make decisions in an ordered-obvious domain while not grasping the complexity of the operational environment.

The logic is deceptively simple, but seriously flawed: killing a legitimate target during war is a morally permissible act; killing a legitimate target, while safeguarding a nation's forces, is morally permissible and fulfills a leader's obligation to care for the troops; known terrorists are legitimate targets. It is simple: so, what is the problem?

In response, if the object is to reduce the number of terrorists, what if the use of drones as a tactic is actually resulting in the producing of more terrorists while

also delegitimizing our global narrative with regard to holding the moral high ground? More terrorists would mean a longer war and more killing. Delegitimizing our narrative would go against strategic counterinsurgency goals by producing international and domestic outrage. Consequently, an action we might consider morally permissible at the tactical level would be producing results that ran counter to our overall strategic goals. If such are the actual results, the outcome would not be considered acceptable. Moreover, when taking into account perspectives of others, the action would be considered morally dubious.

During the 2012 Fort Leavenworth Ethics Symposium, Dr. Daniel M. Bell addressed such issues in what he called the problems of distance as related to drones.³² He expressed concern that use of drones dehumanizes our enemies in the minds of our soldiers by creating what he termed "a PlayStation mentality."³³ Also, he said that drones may convey an impression of cowardice to those sympathizing with our enemies.³⁴ Therefore, if killing is no more than a video game, we find ourselves in the middle of a slippery ethical slope.³⁵

Bell discussed a topic he called "character and the profession of arms."³⁶ His thought-provoking conclusion was that by using drones, we are in danger of "technology replacing character."³⁷ According to Bell, technology is only as good as the people employing it.³⁸ Furthermore, he said we (U.S. military leaders) stand in danger of becoming mere button pushers in a military led by "tactical generals and presidents."³⁹ He asked, "Who is thinking strategically?"⁴⁰

Furthermore, Bell questioned whether technology has "economized our virtues."⁴¹ He said that drones create "less room for profession, for judgment and virtues of professional soldiers."⁴² He said we are at "risk of becoming mere technicians."⁴³

With these ideas in mind, does the use of drones atrophy our strategic judgment? What is the long-term strategic goal behind the long-distance killing of what are considered legitimate targets? Does this type of tactical action lead to achieving the strategic goal? Are we becoming complacent, using techniques suited for an obvious context while ignoring the complexity of the situation? Are we in danger of "falling over the cliff" into chaos?

Understanding this problem within a complex domain, we need to return to the Cynefin Framework's

idea of probe-sense-respond in order to discover emerging practices. For argument's sake, let us assume that the current use of drones is an example of probing. Should we amplify it?

To answer these questions, let us consider the views of Lt. Col. Douglas A. Pryer, as presented in a paper in *Military Review* in 2013. Pryer maintains that drones tend to perpetuate war and endanger our nation.⁴⁴ He states that using drones to wage war by proxy may not be unethical (morally prohibited), but it is unwise.⁴⁵ According to Pryer, waging war in this way may be good tactics, but it is bad strategy because it can destroy the possibility of a lasting peace by creating undue fear and trauma in enemy territory.⁴⁶ At first glance, this may appear to be a good outcome; we want our enemies to fear us. Nevertheless, it may have unforeseen strategic consequences.

For example, Pryer asserts that drones may create more terrorists.⁴⁷ He cites a 2012 Pew Research Center publication saying that from 2009 to 2012, the number of Pakistanis who considered the United States to be the enemy rose sharply, to 74 percent.⁴⁸ According to Pryer, this period corresponded with increased drone strikes.⁴⁹ He cites data showing a similar correlation in Yemen.⁵⁰

Pryer concludes that fighting remotely may, on the surface, appear to save lives.⁵¹ However, in reality, using drones fuels terrorist attacks that cost more lives in the end.⁵²

If we consider our use of drones as an example of probing to find effective tactics that are ethically permissible, or at least ethically dubious, then we can conclude this probing is producing an undesirable strategic outcome. Should we abandon it?

Additionally, as noted, the use of drones delegitimizes our narrative and undermines our counterinsurgency goals by producing international and domestic outrage due to the collateral damage drones cause in terms of dead civilians. Moreover, with regard to propaganda generated by our enemies' global sympathizers, the use of drones in general is used to depict Americans as cowards who kill from afar, which feeds the general anti-American and anti-Western narrative.

Consequently, a morally permissible action we are using at the tactical level is producing results that run counter to our overall strategic goals and to a morally acceptable outcome—because it is not shortening the conflict.

Another consequence is that the use of drones is atrophying our strategic and moral judgment. Who among our leaders is thinking strategically and therefore macro-ethically? For example, what is the long-term strategic goal behind the long-distance killing of what are currently regarded as legitimate targets? Does this tactical decision lead to that goal? Or, are we becoming complacent, using an analysis suited for making decisions in an obvious domain but not for a complex domain? In using drones, are we, therefore, in danger of falling over the cliff into moral as well as operational chaos with regard to our fight against terrorists in areas where we are using drones?

Conclusion

Complexity is at the heart of many, if not most, strategic-level decisions. Like the strategic corporal example, seemingly small tactical actions can have far-reaching strategic implications. Conversely, through technology, generals and presidents can make tactical decisions at the risk of ignoring the likely strategic outcome.

This highlights that our profession of arms requires leaders at all levels to understand and visualize their operational environments—the higher the level, the larger the environment. Hence, the need for macro-ethics. As our environments grow ever larger and more complex, leaders need to understand, visualize, and more closely consider the strategic outcomes of their tactical decisions using macro-ethics as a guide.

Leaders need to acknowledge that certain otherwise morally permissible acts on the tactical level could have grave moral consequences on the strategic level. Conversely, morally dubious acts on the tactical level may produce morally desirable consequences on the strategic level. A useful tool to navigate this complex situation is the Cynefin Framework which helps frame complex macro-ethical considerations. By using ethical probes, leaders can determine whether tactical decisions are producing morally acceptable strategic outcomes.

In our current struggle against terrorism, especially in a fiscally constrained environment, we cannot afford many strategic failures. We need to get it right and get it right quickly with minimal expenditure financially and with regard to minimizing casualties. As stewards of the profession, our leaders, both military and political, owe the American people due diligence concerning the blood and treasure of the nation. We

have a moral obligation to facilitate as rapidly as possible the coming of an honorable and just peace, not just for the United States, but also throughout the world. While hastening the defeat of global terrorism

and pursuing the goal of a just peace, leaders must analyze ethical decisions carefully, prudently, and with an eye to their second and third order effects on the final prize. ■

Notes

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48. *Ibid.* See Pryer's fifteenth end note, which cites "Pakistani Public Opinion Ever More Critical of U.S." Pew Research Global Attitudes Project, 27 June 2012, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2012/06/27/pakistani-public-opinion-ever-more-critical-of-u-s/>.
49. Pryer.
50. *Ibid.* See Pryer's fifth end note, which cites The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, "Covert Drone War," *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism*, 12 November 2012, <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/category/projects/drones/>.
51. Pryer.
52. *Ibid.*