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Treating Wounded Civilians on the Battlefield

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The United States is currently fighting two wars, Iraq and Afghanistan. Reports come in everyday about civilians being killed and wounded on the battlefield, some of these casualties and wounds are a direct result of US Soldiers actions on the battlefield.

During a visit to an Afghanistan village, an infantry platoon of Army Soldiers receives word from the Company Commander that they need to move to another village and help support another platoon currently engaged with a group of Taliban fighters. A few moments later the Soldiers come under attack from the village that they are visiting from a group of Taliban fighters. The Soldiers engage right away, suppress the attack, and take control of the village within minutes of the initial attack. After taking the village, the Soldiers are approach by two Afghan women who are carrying a small child who seems to be no more than four years old.

The platoon medic examines what is now determined to be one of the women's grandsons. It has been determined that the boy ended up in the middle of the firefight. The medic determines that the boy will not survive unless he receives medical attention right away. The Platoon leader gets on the radio, calls the Company Commander, and explains that the boy has received several bullet wounds; the medic determines that the boy's wounds are a result of 5.56mm rounds, meaning that it came from a US Soldiers weapon. He also tells the Commander that the boy will not survive unless he receives medical care right away.

The Company Commander informs the Platoon Leader because of the critical situation of the other platoon that they will not approve the request to medevac the boy out of the village and that once they have the village secured; the platoon needs to proceed to the next objective. This does not sit well with the Platoon Leader; as a human being and a father of an eight-year-old boy

back at home, he cannot understand the Commanders decision not to medevac the boy to the Forward Operating Base (FOB).

After talking to his Platoon Sergeant, the Platoon Leader decides to disobey the Company Commanders order and has the platoon medic and a security team takes the boy back to the FOB by Humvee for further medical care. The Platoon Leader understands that the decision that he has made might cost him his career as an officer in the US Army, but as a human being and a father, he cannot watch a four-year-old boy bleed to death.

This situation raises an ethical dilemma that many Soldiers are likely to face or have faced in combat. In this case, the boy received wounds from a weapon of a US Soldier. Regardless of how the boy received his wounds or what the intentions were of the Soldiers, the Platoon Leader felt that it was the duty of himself and the platoon to seek medical attention for the boy even though his Company Commander established that the boy not receive medical care back at the FOB.

So the question is raised, did the Platoon Leader and the members of the platoon have a moral obligation to make sure the boy receives the medical attention needed to save his life? Does the US military have a moral obligation to provide medical attention to civilians who receive wounds by US troops in combat? Should they disobey the Commanders order not to medevac the boy?

The term utilitarianism states that whatever decision one makes that decision should result in the greatest amount of good for the greatest amount of people. In the case of the wounded boy, the right decision would be to make sure that the boy received the proper care and treatment for his wounds. This action would save not only the boy's life but also it would make

the people of the village happy, and it could ultimately help with the relations between the people of the village and the Soldiers of that platoon.

Another argument for treating civilians on the battlefield is that combatants must place the safety of civilian non-combatants over their own. As Soldiers, we realize that we must place the safety of civilians over our own personal safety. Soldiers are looked to as heroes; we are the ones that America and the world look to in a time of need. When a civilian is injured or in distress, the American Soldier is the one who they look to protect them and their loved ones.

There is one other side to the philosophy of utilitarianism; arguing against providing medical aid to civilians who are wounded on the battlefield by our own forces. One could and should argue that not stopping to help the wounded civilians even though we may be ultimately responsible for their injuries is for the greater good.

What happens when a platoon stops to provide medical attention to civilians who were wounded by US Forces? Does this expose the platoon to a greater risk? Does it take them out of the fight? Is the greater good not to stop and help the civilians on the battlefield but to get to the next objective and help our fellow comrades who are under direct contact with the enemy? Let's not forget about the Soldiers Creed and I will not leave a fallen comrade. Also by helping civilians on the battlefield, are we setting a dangerous precedent? We could find ourselves constantly giving medical aid to civilians even though we may not even be responsible for their injuries. How is a US Soldier responsible for the injuries of a civilian wounded by the enemy? The Soldier had nothing to do with that injury; the enemy is the one who inflicted that pain on that civilian.

Aiding civilians wounded on the battlefield could seriously endanger the mission. We have to take into account the primary mission of the platoon that is involved. We cannot take time to help civilians on the battlefield because that could take us out of our primary mission and it could ultimately affect the mission as a whole.

In conclusion, based on the information that was provided in this paper, one has to argue that there is more support for providing aid to civilians who are wounded on the battlefield either by our own Soldiers or by the enemy. If the infantry Platoon Leader or any member of the platoon got relieved for trying to save the boys life that would not matter, what mattered is that some one in that platoon tried to save that boys life.

Soldiers must provide medical care to a civilian who receive wounds on the battlefield even if it endangers the Soldier himself. This philosophy of Soldiers protecting civilians goes all the way back to the Civil War days, when Dr. Mary Walker not only treated the Union Soldiers and civilians but she consistently crossed over to the Confederate side to treat civilians who received wounds or were sick.

Not only do American service members have the duty to protect civilians on the battlefield, we also have the duty to minimize the hardship on the civilian population because of our actions on the battlefield. When the United States enters into a conflict in another nation, we are also entering into a contract to protect the innocent civilians of that nation. When we fail to protect those civilians on the battlefield that are injured or wounded, we have now assumed the responsibility of trying to save their lives. As the world power, we have an obligation to take the moral high ground in a time of war.