

# The Greatest Military Leadership Challenge of Our Day: Cultivating the Warrior Ethic Sustaining Military Power

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## OPENING:

Thanks.

Since this series started in 2015 you have heard ...

Carl Wilken on *opposing genocide*.  
Robert Wicks on *maintaining ethical perspective in combat*.  
Jessica Buchanan on *her amazing rescue by Navy SEALs*.  
James Giordano on how *ethics relates to neuro-cognitive science*.  
Mark Coppenger on *Edward Snowden leaking CIA secrets*.  
Clinton Longnecker on *ethical temptations resulting from success*.

And ... today you'll hear me address *cultivating the warrior ethic sustaining military power & why I think it is the greatest military leadership challenge of our day*.

You know, of course, I am addressing a *very* sensitive topic—not because it is highly classified—but rather because it touches our most deeply held beliefs.

And I realize, of course, that our most deeply held beliefs are not all the same. Here today I know that we have people of *different* faiths, *different* worldviews, and *different* deeply held convictions.

So I want to make two things clear from the start ...

First, what I say *does not* represent the Chaplain's Office, *does not* represent any political or religious organization, and *only* represents my own thoughts and convictions about something we all consider very important.

Second, I will present what I say respectfully, humbly, and sincerely ... and I hope you will consider what I say the same way.

Terms I will use:

“Ethics”—————▶ is a *body of beliefs* that form personal character and govern personal behavior, conduct, desires.

“Leadership”—————▶ is getting a group of people to fulfill a mission.

- “Ethical leadership” —▶ is getting a group of people to respect a shared body of ethical beliefs essential to fulfilling a common mission.
- “Sustaining ethic” —▶ is a body of ethical beliefs on which the survival of something depends & without which it would cease to exist.
- “Warrior ethic” —▶ is a body of ethical beliefs needed to be a successful warrior.
- “Sacrificial ethic” —▶ is a body of ethical beliefs worth dying for.
- “Military power” —▶ is the ability of armed forces to fulfill assigned missions.

### WHAT I WILL ADDRESS:

I will claim that ... *the most consequential & most difficult challenge military leaders face today is cultivating the warrior ethic on which achieving the national security mission most depends.*

And I will discuss what military leaders can—and cannot—do about it.

### MAIN IDEAS:

The “sustaining ethic” of the military armed forces is a “warrior ethic” ... and a “warrior ethic” only “sustains” the military mission if it is a “sacrificial ethic.”

A warrior ethic must answer why one should *not* make self-survival the chief goal of the ethic one lives by.

There are many contrary belief systems about the nature of ethical thinking claiming it either is ...

- Non-universal or Universal
- Changing or Fixed
- Optional or Obligatory
- Self-centered or Self-disciplinary
- Self-indulging v. Self-sacrificing

Thus ALL variations of ethical thought are not equally sufficient for sustaining national security.

An effective warrior ethic is *by definition* one that is universal, fixed, obligatory, self-disciplinary, and sacrificial ... making it one by which service members live for something more than just surviving. *It means living for something greater than life itself.*

A “warrior” ethic is comprised of several elements which are:

1. A sense of *ultimate* commitment (that is wholehearted rather than partial or hesitant).
2. A willingness to persevere no matter how hard or how long.
3. A sense of *sacrifice* (of willingness to risk life and die if necessary for a worthy cause).
4. A sense of *self-discipline* (of living for values limiting passions & appetites).
5. A sense of *accountability* (of accepting personal responsibility when no one’s around).
6. A sense of *submission* to higher authority deserving allegiance.

7. A sense of *unit cohesion* (of working with others for shared goals).

★ It is a fact that military power able to ensure national security *over time* depends *more on* cultivating voluntary acceptance of an effective warrior ethic *than on* superior technology, intelligence, or training.

★ It is a fact that a warrior ethic cannot be cultivated without believing in a source of some sort of transcendent ethical authority controlling what follows physical death.

★ It is a fact that what military leaders most need to sustain military power depends on cultivating something they do not control.

*THIS* is what I am calling the greatest military leadership challenge of our day, and this lecture will clarify this challenge and consider what may and may not be done to meet it.

#### WHAT I AM NOT SAYING:

I am *not* saying no one has thought of this before.

I am *not* saying military leaders do not already realize an effective warrior ethic has to be sacrificial.

And I am *not* saying the military services are not already stressing a sacrificial ethic.

Rather I am *only* dealing with the challenge of *cultivating* such an ethic.

#### WHY LISTEN TO ME?

I know what you do (generally) and know what you're up against in terms of *ethical leadership*.

I have life experiences & academic expertise that give me unique insight into this important topic.

- \* I was born in China during the Communist Revolution there.
- \* My earliest memories are growing up with tribes in the jungles of N. Thailand as Communist insurgents were starting to infiltrate the region.
- \* I was trained for military leadership at the US Naval Academy from which I graduated in 1972.
- \* I served as a commissioned officer in combat during the Vietnam War.
- \* I served as Legislative Advisor to a US Senator for 4 years (1985-1989).
- \* I served in policy development at the White House under President George H. W. Bush (1989-1991),  
during which I drafted the Just War ethical framework the President used leading Coalitions forces during the Persian Gulf War.

\* I served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Military Manpower, DASN(M) (1991-1993) during which ...

I oversaw force management for USN & USMC for during the Persian Gulf War;

Oversaw military training & and disciplinary standards;

Stood in for the Secretary of the Navy making final decisions on BCNR (Board for Correction of Naval Records) appeals at the highest level on disciplinary actions for the Dept of the Navy;

And I oversaw, reviewed, and tried to improve ethics training at USNA (more on this later).

I worked on manpower and force structure issues with General Krulak when he was USMC Deputy Chief of Staff for Manpower & Reserve Affairs.

General Krulak went on to serve as Commandant of the Marine Corps, and military novel writer Tom Clancy once referred to him as the “Warrior Prince of the Corps.”

I worked on manpower issues with Admiral Thomas Moorer.

He was retired but had been CNO and Chairman of the JCS at the height of the Vietnam War.

I worked on manpower issues with Lt General Charles G. Cooper, the inspirational military leader who authored the “Band of Brothers” concept fostering unit cohesion in the USMC.

And I now have 24 years of experience (1993-2017) as a scholar in the field of ethics, and have developed what some now consider the most comprehensive ethics program in the world.

But ....

#### TRUTH IN ADVERTISING:

While I WAS in military and political leadership, I NOW work at a religious school.

And, while I have a science degree from USNA and understand PHILOSOPHICAL ethics, my expertise is in CHRISTIAN ethics.

But the challenge I am addressing today is at the intersection of religious and secular thought and, for that reason, addressing it requires understanding BOTH religious and secular thought.

Let me be clear ... I understand that the US military services, including the DIA, are SECULAR and I *respect* the institutional separation of secular & religious authority.

And yet, with that understanding, I want nevertheless to address something ESSENTIAL to the military mission that CANNOT ignore the role of faith convictions held by US service members.

So ... please hear me out ... because what you hear COULD be one of the most important lectures you hear in your life.

But ... that's just what I think and you'll have to decide if you agree.

Consider now what I saw when I was DASN(M) and reviewed ethics training at the Naval Academy.

WHAT I SAW REVIEWING ETHICS TRAINING AT USNA:

I think we may have some here today who represent the ethics program at the US Naval Academy, and I first want to *highly commend* what they are doing.

It is far better than when I went through training at USNA back in the late 60's and early 70's—which then had no specifically identified “ethics training” program.

And when I reviewed the USNA ethics training program in the early 90's I saw Navy leaders acknowledging a real need, taking it very seriously, and trying hard to address it.

In fact ... I think the “ethics training” program at USNA is the *best* such program available within any military service *anywhere in the world!*

But ... nothing is perfect and beyond improving, and one thing I observed (at least at that time) is that instructors were stressing desired standards & character traits with no basis of ethical authority.

In other words, I observed an ethics program focused on WHAT and without answering WHY?

I observed a program focused strongly on results but weak on what justifies & motivates them.

It was an ethics training program for future military leaders that offered no way of *cultivating* deeply held ethical convictions except through “ambition,” “peer pressure,” “buddy loyalty,” or “fear.”

But then ... USNA (like DIA) is a *secular* institution and instructors there were trying their BEST.

And it started me thinking about what I am sharing with you today.

THE PROBLEM:

The problem is that military leaders can easily make rules, stress ideals, and require courses.

But ... how can they cultivate *risk taking, sacrificial obedience, and placing duty over survival in combat?*

How can they cultivate *risking life for the common good over living for self and pleasure?*

Military leaders need a warrior ethic that ... to be effective ... must answer why one would *not* make surviving the highest goal he or she lives for?

But answering THAT traditionally comes from RELIGION *and poses a conundrum for military leaders who must separate the roles religious & secular institutions have in our society.*

Put another way, the problem for military leaders is how to get service members to obey orders to risk everything *without turning commanders into gods and without worshiping the chain of command in place of religion.*

#### WHAT SOME MAJOR FIGURES HAVE SAID:

George Washington, the first president of the United States and FATHER of our armed forces, said, “Let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle” (*Farewell Speech*, 1796).

The great Russian author Fyodor Dostoevsky (*Crime and Punishment, Brothers Karamazov*) is famous for having said, “If God does not exist, everything is permitted” (*The Brothers Karamazov*, 1880).

The philosopher Immanuel Kant, although he did not think the existence of God can be proven beyond reasonable doubt, nevertheless had to admit it is only men who believe in God who voluntarily limit their use of power out of respect for norms restricting their passions.

In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant admitted that according to *practical experience* it certainly seems that, “if the world is without an Author ... (then) moral ideas and principles lose all validity” (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A468).

And in *Perpetual Peace*, Kant confessed that, as far as he knew, reason alone *never* moves men to use power ethically and therefore had to say, when it comes to THAT, only believing in God ever really works (Kant, *Perpetual Peace* [Beck, 1957], 14).

And the 20<sup>th</sup> century British philosopher F. P. Ramsey (who did not himself believe in God), confessed that, without believing in a transcendent deity ruling the world and controlling life after death, it is very hard to get men to live for anything beyond pursuing their passions (Ramsey, *Philosophical Papers* [Cambridge, 1990] 246-247).

#### THE CHALLENGE IS EVEN WORSE NOW THAN IT WAS:

Friedrich St. Florian (who designed the National World War II Monument in DC) was quoted by the *New York Times* as saying,

“I think it is fair to say that during World War II there was a high sense of purpose. The country had a very clear vision of its own standing, of its own morality. It was not an ambiguous time. (But) Today, we live in a world that is highly ambiguous, very fractured, with many of the historical, traditional values in a state of collapse” (Thomas Keenan, “The Way We Live Now,” *New York Times Magazine*, July 1, 2001).

Robert Fitch (who was a professor of political science at Long Island University) once observed ...

“Ours is an age where ethics has become obsolete. It is superseded by science. Deleted by psychology. Dismissed as emotive by philosophy. It is drowned in compassion, evaporates into aesthetics and retreats before relativism. The usual moral distinctions between good and bad are simply drowned in a maudlin emotion in which we feel more sympathy for the murderer than for the murdered, for the adulterer than for the betrayed, and in which we have begun to believe that the real guilty party, the one who somehow caused it all, is the victim, and not the perpetrator of the crime” (Fitch, “The Obsolescence of Ethics,” *Christianity and Crisis* [November 16, 1959]: 163-165).

### STORY:

Let me tell you what Admiral Boorda noticed back in the 1970’s and discussed with me one when we were seated together at a Navy Birthday Banquet.

Admiral Boorda was Chief of Naval Personnel (CNP) when I served as DASN(M), and I worked with him on Navy manpower issues like recruiting, discipline, and force structure.

Now just to get it out of the way, I think everyone here knows Boorda later became the 25<sup>th</sup> Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), the first (and so far only) former enlisted man ever to rise to command the entire Navy, and then tragically took his own life. But I knew him as a leader who loved the Navy and was zealous about cultivating good ethical character.

We had served in the Tonkin Gulf at the same time (when he was XO of a destroyer escort (USS Brooke, DEG-1) operating with the larger ship on which I served (USS Jouett, DLG-29).

That evening he told me of something he had started noticing when commanding a ship and holding Captain’s Mast.

— STORY —

This led him to realize the armed forces could no longer assume new recruits already hold to the same ethic on which military service operates—and needs only to stress it.

Instead he realized the services were moving into a new era when they would need to teach what a warrior ethic requires starting from scratch—or risk losing the discipline sustaining military power.

### AT THE SAME WE LIVE IN A WORLD INCREASINGLY HOSTILE TO THE US:

We see the rise of extremely militant Islam (ISIS).

We see the rise of an extremely militant North Korea.

We see the rise of extremely military gangs (MS 13).

And we see these all driven by powerful self-sacrificing ideologies detrimental to US interests.

SO WE FACE TWO SERIOUS THREATS—BOTH STRAINING THE WARRIOR ETHIC:

One is *internal* & one *external*.

INTERNALLY, a therapeutic, self-centered, self-indulgent ethic totally contrary to self-discipline & sacrifice is sweeping US culture and infiltrating the minds of military recruits.

And at the same time, EXTERNALLY, powerful sacrificial ideologies are building up hostile forces intent on destroying us.

Each could destroy the warrior ethic sustaining US military power all by itself.

But working together each enhances the menace of the other & and left unchecked they threaten the survival of our nation.

★ It means that unless military leaders check their influence by cultivating the warrior ethic sustaining national security, our nation will *implode*.

★ It means if the warrior ethic on which US military power depends is overrun by a therapeutic ethic which opposes and destroys personal sacrifice, then external forces will overcome our security forces, and the United States will collapse!

★ These combined threats both concern *ethical convictions* and only cultivating suitably contrary *ethical convictions* will stop them.

TRANSITION: I will focus now mainly on addressing the *internal* threat & will leave addressing the *external* threat to others ...

TWO ENORMOUS COMPLICATIONS:

When it comes to countering how self-centered valuing threatens an effective warrior ethic, there are two *enormously important* complications military leaders cannot ignore and must try to understand:

FIRST they must distinguish religious from secular authority while taking advantage of how religion sustains life-transcending ethical convictions.

SECOND they must distinguish *helpful* from *harmful* effects stemming from religious convictions without singling out particular faith traditions as such.

Temptation: In trying to avoid these complications, it is tempting to think a warrior ethic might be cultivated by relying on *science* or *natural law philosophy* without involving faith convictions held by service members at all.

But in real life that NEVER works!



### SCIENCE CANNOT ESTABLISH A WARRIOR ETHIC:

The British philosopher Aldous Huxley (no friend of religion) once bluntly confessed he knew that science does not answer questions about the meaning of life and death, and thus (in his own words) has no “right to give to me my reason for being and my definition for existence.”

But he sadly went on say he nevertheless preferred *pretending* it could (*pretending* something he knew to be *false*) because doing so “frees me to (pursue) my own erotic and political desires” (Aldous Huxley, *Ends and Means* [London: Chatto & Windus, 1937]).

In other words, Huxley confessed that he knew an ethic strong enough to limit his self-centered passions *cannot* come from science and *can only* come from believing in a source of ethical authority transcending science left to itself.

And Wilfred McClay (a professor of history at the University of Oklahoma, and served on the National Council on the Humanities, and was a senior fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center) once said,

“nothing that religion does is more important than equipping us to endure life’s passages, by helping us find meaning in pain and loss” (Wilfred McClay, “Religion in Politics; Politics in Religion,” *Commentary* [October 1, 1988]).

In other words, faith convictions establish a sense of ethical ultimacy science cannot duplicate.

Thus, however inconvenient, we must acknowledge that science is not *in and of itself* adequate for establishing an ethic of individual risk and sacrifice.

I am *not* saying an ethic cannot be formulated based on science alone—only that it will not be one that is individually sacrificial.

### NATURAL LAW PHILOSOPHY CANNOT ESTABLISH A WARRIOR ETHIC:

So, if cultivating a warrior ethic does not come from science, perhaps we can still avoid religious complications by turning to natural law philosophy.

But that doesn’t work either!

The self-subordination and personal sacrifice essential to forming a warrior ethic does not come from observing nature *in and of itself* because, as Gilbert Meilaender (long time professor of ethics at Valparaiso University) observes,

. . . doing THAT only “gives rise to an ethic that makes survival central” and never suggests sacrificing present life for anything beyond physical death (Gilbert C. Meilaender, *Faith & Faithfulness* [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991], 118).

In other words, Meilaender means cultivating a sacrificial ethic transcending self-indulgence, self-centeredness, and self-satisfaction does not come from just observing the world we see but rather requires faith in something beyond life to make sense of dying for a worthy cause.

So again, however inconvenient, we also must acknowledge that, while natural law philosophy alleges to establish ethics without religion, it comes at the cost of undermining an effective warrior ethic.

Natural law philosophy without transcendence (without religion) has no place for risking life for a worthy cause.

It cannot deal with times when what I should do to survive is not what I should do for *others* to survive or what I should do to assure *national security*.

Again, I am *not* saying an ethic cannot be formulated based on nature alone—only that it will not be one that is individually sacrificial.

TRANSITION: The point is neither science (in and of itself) nor natural law philosophy (in and of itself) are *sufficient* to cultivate the warrior ethic sustaining military power.

CONCLUSIONS: So where does this leave us? And where in particular does this leave US military leaders who must distinguish the role and authority of secular and religious institutions and cannot favor one faith or view of ultimate truth over others?

First, I think we must admit people could *in theory* be self-sacrificially ethical based on some sort of non-religious reasoning.

But, second, I think we must also acknowledge that *in practice* that never happens.

I know you do not all agree ... but for myself ...

I do not think we can do better than Immanuel Kant who struggled to find a non-religious basis able to overcome self-interest and had to admit that *in practical terms* there is no such thing.

I do not think we can do better than Aldous Huxley who realized science offers nothing transcending his own passions and saw that nothing other than religion could override them.

And I think we can and will never go beyond Kant and Huxley because *in practical terms* human passions NEVER submit to human reason & without faith in something transcending ourselves human reason ALWAYS succumbs to human passions.

And, because of this second conclusion, I am led thirdly to believe the warrior ethic on which US military power depends can be cultivated

.... *ONLY BY AFFIRMING WHAT SERVICE MEMBERS THINK TRANSCENDS THEIR PHYSICAL COMFORTS AND SURVIVAL.*

Please don't get me wrong. I am *not* saying secular leaders in the military should dictate what that is ... but rather am *only* saying they need to affirm *whatever* service members believe it is.

Fourth, I think this means US military power *ultimately* depends on cultivating faith convictions military leaders do not control.

The irony in this is: This nation is not a theocracy ... but we need faith convictions to cultivate an effective warrior ethic.

So, fifth, I think this means US military leaders must work closely with military chaplains to find ways to cultivate an effective the warrior ethic by affirming whatever faith conviction service members believe sustain an ethic of self-discipline and personal sacrifice ... but they must do so without crossing the line separating secular from religious institutions, and without weakening respect for religious liberty.

So what *can*, and *cannot*, be done?

WHAT CANNOT BE DONE: Military leaders *cannot* do the following ...

They *cannot* usurp the role of faith convictions (or of deity; or of God) in the lives of service members.

They *cannot* require service members to override deeply held faith convictions.

They *cannot* promote any one faith tradition (in and of itself) to the exclusion of others.

They *can neither ignore nor* usurp how faith convictions serve to cultivate an effective warrior ethic.

And they *can neither* treat views of ethical ultimacy as irrelevant to cultivating an effective warrior ethic *nor* elevate any one view of ethical ultimacy over all the rest.

WHAT CAN BE DONE: Military leaders *can* do the following ...

They *can* work with chaplains to distinguish ideologies opposing the Constitution of the United States from those compatible with defending it.

They *can* work with chaplains to distinguish beliefs favoring military order and discipline from those opposing it.

They *can* work with chaplains to distinguish convictions affirming duty to take orders from and fighting along with persons of different faiths from convictions hindering that.

And they *can* exclude or expel from military service those (like conscientious objectors) whose ethical convictions clash with embracing an effective warrior ethic.

REVIEW:

I have observed that an effective warrior ethic requires faith in a source of ethical ultimacy that, not only affects how service members live, but affects what they will risk dying for.

I have observed an ethic of self-indulgence is sweeping the culture and is threatening the warrior ethic on which military power depends, while forces driven by sacrificial ideologies threaten us externally.

I have argued that to meet this challenge military leaders must cultivate an effective warrior ethic.

↳ That doing this requires a sense of ethical ultimacy transcending personal survival.

↳ That this sense of ethical ultimacy comes from faith, not from science or philosophy.

↳ And that to cultivate it military leaders must work with military chaplains to affirm faith convictions sustaining a sacrificial ethic, yet without becoming theocratic or diminishing respect for religious liberty.

CLOSING:

We are living in critical days and are facing enormous challenges threatening national security, of which the GREATEST are those eroding & destroying the warrior ethic on US survival most depends.

This challenge must be addressed *shrewdly* because it involves the way faith convictions give service members an ethic worth living and dying for.

Military leaders must neither (1) deny the relevance of religion nor (2) exalt one over the rest.

And I think the BEST they can do is to *respect & encourage* faith convictions that favor defending the US Constitution without trying to control them.

STORY: How the Hmong sacrificed everything fighting Communism because ...

“Your father taught us how to think”

It was their faith convictions that made all the difference.

THAT is what made their warrior ethic strong enough to lay EVERYTHING on the line against the allure of Communist propaganda!

THAT is what made their warrior ethic resilient enough to persist in resisting the false promises of Communist ideology against ALL ODDS!