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Delivering Military Ethics Education to the Colombian Armed Forces: Centre for Military Ethics' Collaboration with Colombian Military Educational Facilities

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ABSTRACT

This article describes the progress and impact of the King's College London Centre for Military Ethics since its collaboration with the Colombian military forces' educational institutions. More specifically, the article focusses on expanding the military ethics course across different educational facilities of the Colombian Army and the Colombian Navy and Air Force. The impact of the education delivered using an online course designed to be completed without a tutor is analysed and presented. The final part of the article describes a way forward as far as the Colombian project is concerned, as well as the refinement of the course materials and launch of new tools.

Introduction

Proficiency in International Humanitarian Law is a crucial requirement for members of armed forces (see IHL, Rule 142; Geneva Conventions I, Art. 47; Geneva Conventions II, Art. 48; Geneva Conventions III, Art. 127; Geneva Conventions IV, Art. 144). However, such proficiency does not necessarily imply the ability to translate the legal standards into practice on the battlefield when the decision must be taken within less than a second. Knowing the principles, especially concerning the threat of and the use of lethal force, is critical; nevertheless, the reality on the battlefield is replete with ethically challenging situations that require a trained mindset to solve them.

Applied military ethics is one medium that helps prepare military personnel to face possible ethical challenges and dilemmas. An ethical approach to solving problems in the military context has been shown to reduce suffering and distress (Warner et al. 2011), and while there is an increased demand for military ethics education in the international realm, the supply of such education has been relatively scarce (Whetham 2018; Bricknell and Miron 2021). Precisely this shortage has served as the primary rationale for

setting up the King's Centre for Military Ethics (KCME hereafter) at the King's College London's Defence Studies Department in 2015.

The main aim was to fill the existing lacuna concerning the delivery of military ethics education to military personnel both domestically and internationally (Whetham 2018). To ensure both flexibility and speedy delivery of such education, researchers working alongside practitioners and military lawyers developed an integrated online suite to enable military personnel across the globe to benefit from a self-directed course that covers the main topics in military ethics built on a core foundation provided by a book and online course initially produced by Deane-Peter Baker at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) entitled *Key Concept in Military Ethics* (Baker 2015).

More specifically, the course consists of 18 parts to cover both theoretical and practical elements of military ethics This includes: providing a foundation in ethical theory; ethical triangulation (how to make decisions); ethics in the military profession (focusing on the values and standards broadly common across different military institutions); several modules exploring aspects of Just War Theory (covering *Jus ad bellum*, *Jus in bello*, and *Jus post bellum*, including *Mala in se*); military ethics in humanitarian operations; military ethics in counter-insurgency and counterterrorism operations; military ethics and society (exploring the manifestations of the civil/military covenant and the limits of service); and military medical ethics. It concludes with a look forward to emerging and future challenges within the domain of military ethics. The original material was developed and expanded as part of the PLuS Alliance strategic partnership with UNSW, King's College London, and Arizona State University.

The KCME course is supplemented by military ethics playing cards and a mobile phone application, accessible on both iOS and Android smartphones (Miron and Bricknell 2021). Leveraging the ubiquity of playing cards in daily life, the objective is to utilise them as a means to enhance ethical awareness by promoting discussion and the socialisation of shared values. These cards consist of fifty-four questions spanning various aspects of military ethics, crafted by researchers, practitioners and ethicists. The questions draw on professional military ethics education curricula, incorporating insights from research, testing on military focus groups, and consultations with legal experts. Distributed to military units, these cards serve as a tool for initiating informal discussions and debates, thereby encouraging conversations around ethical challenges encountered in military contexts. Each card has a QR code that links to KCME's dedicated webpage on which each question on the card is complemented with additional prompts for thought and discussion, explanation, and information on supporting reading designed for further exploration of the topic at hand. Groups of questions are thematically linked so impromptu or pre-planned discussions can quickly be developed using the open-access material.

Given the success of the course both in the UK and abroad, KCME was approached by the Colombian Military Forces with a request to help refine their existing professional military education. Such refinement was perceived as crucial given the ongoing low-intensity conflict with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP) (Saab and Taylor 2009; Aguilera Peña 2013; Cubides Cárdenas et al. 2019; Torrijos Rivera and Abella Osorio 2018; Arratia-Sandoval, Jimenez-Cabrera, and Barria-Jorquera 2020), the National Liberation Army (ELN), and several other criminal and drug-trafficking groups (Erazo-Patiño and Coronado-Camero 2022;

Barrero-Barrero and Alvarez-Calderon 2022; Villalba-Garcia, Coronado-Camero, and Sierra-Gutiérrez 2022).

This article describes the KCME experience in delivering military ethics education to the Colombian Military Forces and its expansion within Colombia's military educational structures. In addition, it presents the impact that the course has generated as regards the perception of the use of lethal force as well as military ethics in general. To date, more than 3000 military personnel worldwide – from captains to admirals, from majors to generals – from Military Forces have successfully completed the *Key Concepts* course.

Introduction of the key concepts course at the *Escuela Superior de Guerra "General Rafael Reyes Prieto"*

Military service members frequently confront high-stakes, life-threatening scenarios, leading to elevated occurrences of work-related post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety. However, resources such as the KCME course and military ethics playing cards, along with the accompanying mobile app, offer valuable support to military personnel. This is particularly beneficial for those serving in the armed forces of countries engaged in protracted violent conflicts like the Colombian military, aiding them in making informed decisions and effectively navigating and addressing their experiences.

As this course is designed to help institutions that deliver professional military education around the world to include military ethics as part of their curriculum, and with the support offered by the UK Ministry of Defence, the KCME was able to translate the course's core materials into the Spanish language to facilitate the integration of the *Key Concepts* course at the Colombian War College (Escuela Superior de Guerra "General Rafael Reyes Prieto"; ESDEG hereafter). A memorandum of understanding has established a strategic relationship between ESDEG and KCME. The main aim was to create a complete military ethics curriculum for all students at ESDEG. ESDEG department for leadership and ethics took charge of the project. The 18-part military ethics curriculum was co-developed with the Australian Centre for the Study of Armed Conflict and Society (at the University of New South Wales, Canberra).

In Spring 2019, the newly developed military ethics curriculum was launched at ESDEG for the first time. This included course materials and the so-called "train-the-trainer" sessions to ensure that the teaching staff was fully familiarised with the materials and comfortable delivering the new course. At ESDEG, this course is delivered through an innovative form of teaching in the form of lectures, discussions, practical exercises with the military ethics playing cards and app, and virtual training encompassing a one-month syllabus. Lecturers aim to foster situational awareness and decision-making on day-to-day circumstances drawn from real scenarios. Therefore, it helps enhance the general and military ethics subjects that are part of the military courses offered by ESDEG.

Expansion of the key concepts course to other military educational institutions

Given the success of the course at ESDEG and the positive feedback received from students, other military educational institutions started to display an interest in integrating the said course. In the autumn of 2020, KCME's online course was adopted by the

Colombian Army's Combined Arms School (Escuela de Armas Combinadas del Ejercito or ESACE), forming part of the broader Centre for Military Education (Centro de Educación Militar or CEMIL) under the command of the Command for Education and Doctrine (Comando de Educación y Doctrina del Ejercito or CEDOC).

The integration of the course was funded by the ESRC Impact Acceleration Account as part of the Heritage, Dignity, Violence 2019 scheme (Grant number: HDV190115) and enabled researchers working for KCME and their Colombian counterparts to develop, as a point of improvement and learning, an additional module which had been specifically requested by the course participants. This module is a product of collaboration between KCME and the Colombian Army, including integral support offered by the Directorate for Application of Transparency Norms of the National Army (Dirección de Aplicación de Normas de Transparencia del Ejército Nacional or DANTE[1]). Within the Colombian Armed Forces, military ethics is defined as conduct marked by the practice of sound morality, accompanied by military values and virtues. Actions undertaken for the nation should be characterised by honour and righteousness, impervious to corruption, and guided by the Political Constitution of Colombia and the law. Furthermore, transparency is viewed as a social value that fosters trust and security, revealing the positive aspects of both individuals and institutions.

To ensure that the aforementioned tasks can be effectively accomplished, this new module deals with anti-corruption measures and ethical behaviour. In addition to its general orientation, specific parts of it have been tailored to meet the Colombian Army and the Colombian Military Forces' needs more broadly. An English-language version of the module has been created for those who want to take the English course. These new materials are expected to be integrated into the platform by December 2023. Currently, the module is pending final approval.

User feedback and validation

One year after the successful implementation of the initial course, KCME and ESDEG received permission to conduct a post-course anonymous online survey to study the impact of the online component of the course as well as gather valuable information on a variety of aspects of the *e*-Learning platform, including contents, multimedia, language, interface design, and playing cards.

This study was approved by the Escuela Superior de Guerra "General Rafael Reyes Prieto," Bogotá D.C., Colombia, including ethical approval and informed consent procedures for anonymized participant information to be published in this article.

In addition to a structured anonymous survey, respondents were given a free text field to leave optional comments. The online survey is hosted on the GDPR-compliant Spark-Chart™ software, which has been approved by King's College London data management officers. The results that have been gathered from Spring 2020 to Summer 2021 are discussed in the following paragraphs.

General statistics

Table 1 below presents some general statistics on the perception of different variables using a 10-point Likert scale, with 10 being the highest score in terms of importance.

Table 1. General Statistics Related to the Perception of the Topic, Course, and Platform.

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Importance of Military Ethics	2828	9.90	.514
Importance of Mil. Ethics within the AF	2828	9.61	1.009
Course Evaluation	2826	9.58	1.025
Fulfilment of Expectations	2826	9.41	1.174
Multimedia Elements	2794	9.32	1.289
Course Language	2794	9.07	1.562
Playing Cards Overall	945	9.02	1.487
Playing Cards Scenarios	945	9.10	1.420

Table 2. Perception of the Importance of Military Ethics by the Colombian Armed Forces.

Importance of Military Ethics		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not at all important	2	.1	.1	.1
	4	1	.0	.0	.1
	5	6	.2	.2	.3
	6	5	.2	.2	.5
	7	11	.4	.4	.9
	8	36	1.3	1.3	2.2
	9	103	3.6	3.6	5.8
	Extremely important	2664	94.2	94.2	100.0
	Total	2828	100.0	100.0	100.0

It is essential to highlight that the mean for the general perception of the importance of military ethics is 9.9, which corresponds to "extremely important." This is valid for all three branches of the Colombian Armed Forces (N = 2.828).

Table 2 (below) shows that *after* taking the KCME online course on military ethics, 94.2 percent (*N* = 2.664) of respondents to the survey found that military ethics is extremely important, rating the importance as "10" on a 10-point Likert scale.

Detailed statistics

In Table 3 below, we explore how different branches of the Colombian Armed Forces perceive a) the importance of military ethics for a military profession in general and b) the importance of military ethics for the Colombian Armed Forces. We can see that the mean for the general importance of military ethics is slightly higher for the Navy (10) and the Air Force (10) than for the Army (9.86); however, all three branches consider military ethics as "extremely" important. Similar outcomes can be observed when looking at means for the importance of military ethics for the Armed Forces. Overall, we can see that all three branches consider the subject as "extremely important" in general and in their specific case. This underlines the importance of the military ethics course that has been introduced at various military educational institutions (outlined above).

Below we present the results of how different ranks perceived the importance of military ethics (using the same two predictors as above). For the importance of military ethics in general, the ranks are as follows (starting with the highest mean): OR8 (10), OF3 (9.94), OF1 (9.94), OF2 (9.89), OR5 (9.82), OF4 (9.50), OR6 (9.25). The results are similarly scattered across different ranks for the specific importance of military ethics without any clear hierarchy. Having tested the relationship between the

Table 3. Perception of Military Ethics by Branch.

Variable	Branch			Statistic	Std. Error
Importance of Mil. Ethics for the military profession	Army	Mean		9.86	.014
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	9.83	
			Upper Bound	9.89	
		Std. Deviation		\.590	
	Navy	Mean		10.00	.000
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	10.00	
			Upper Bound	10.00	
		Std. Deviation		.000	
	Air Force	Mean		10.00	.000
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	10.00	
			Upper Bound	10.00	
		Std. Deviation		.000	
Importance of Mil. Ethics for AF	Army	Mean		9.65	.023
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	9.61	
			Upper Bound	9.70	
		Std. Deviation		.949	
	Navy	Mean		10.00	.000
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	10.00	
			Upper Bound	10.00	
		Std. Deviation		.000	
	Air Force	Mean		10.00	.000
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	10.00	
			Upper Bound	10.00	
		Std. Deviation		.000	

two variables using a *t-Test* and ordinal regression, we found no statistically significant relationship between rank and perception of military ethics, either general or specific (Table 4).

This leads us to conclude that the military ethics course is perceived as equally beneficial for all ranks, without any specific focus on either senior or junior ranking officers. Further, we have several important variables which we sought to explore. These include:

1. Compatibility of military ethics with Rules of Engagement (RoE) in Colombia (scale)
2. Obligation to act ethically even if the adversary does not (nominal)

Table 4. Importance of Military Ethics by Rank (10-point Likert Scale).

Variable	Rank			Statistic	Std. Error
		Importance of Military Ethics by Rank[a,b]			
Importance of Mil. Ethics for the military profession	TC – OF4	Mean		9.50	.500
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	7.91	
			Upper Bound	11.09	
		Std. Deviation		1.000	
	MY – OF3	Mean		9.94	.011
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	9.92	
			Upper Bound	9.96	
		Std. Deviation		.360	
Importance of Mil. Ethics for Armed Forces	CT – OF2	Mean		9.89	.019
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	9.86	
			Upper Bound	9.93	
		Std. Deviation		.460	
	TE – OF1	Mean		9.94	.017
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	9.91	
			Upper Bound	9.97	
		Std. Deviation		.279	
	SM – OR8	Mean		10.00	.000
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	10.00	
			Upper Bound	10.00	
		Std. Deviation		.000	
	SV – OR6	Mean		9.25	.620
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	7.78	
			Upper Bound	10.72	
		Std. Deviation		1.753	
	SS – OR5	Mean		9.82	.025
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	9.77	
			Upper Bound	9.86	
		Std. Deviation		.709	
	TC – OF4	Mean		9.25	.750
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	6.86	
			Upper Bound	11.64	
		Std. Deviation		1.500	
	MY – OF3	Mean		9.51	.033
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	9.45	
			Upper Bound	9.58	
		Std. Deviation		1.115	
	CT – OF2	Mean		9.62	.042
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	9.54	
			Upper Bound	9.71	
		Std. Deviation		1.011	
	TE – OF1	Mean		9.71	.048
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	9.62	
			Upper Bound	9.80	
		Std. Deviation		.799	

Table 4. Continued.

Variable	Rank			Statistic	Std. Error
		Importance of Military Ethics by Rank[a,b]			
	SM – OR8	Mean		10.00	.000
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	10.00	
			Upper Bound	10.00	
		5% Trimmed Mean		10.00	
		Std. Deviation		000	
Importance of Mil. Ethics for Armed Forces	SV – OR6	Mean		9.25	.620
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	7.78	
			Upper Bound	10.72	
		Std. Deviation		1.753	
	SS – OR5	Mean		9.67	.032
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	9.61	
			Upper Bound	9.73	
		Std. Deviation		.914	

[a]Importance of Mil. Ethics for AF is constant when RANK = SP – OR7. It has been omitted.
[b]Importance of Mil. Ethics for AF is constant when RANK = SP – OR7. It has been omitted.

3. Whether or not military ethics facilitates compliance with RoE (scale)
4. Whether or not military ethics increases intra-unit cohesion (scale)
5. Whether or not military ethics increases inter-unit cohesion (scale)
6. Whether or not military ethics is universal (nominal)
7. Whether or not military ethics is based on religious beliefs (nominal)
8. Whether or not military ethics is negatively correlated with operational effectiveness (nominal)
9. Whether or not military ethics is culture-dependent (nominal)
10. Applicability of course topics to the Colombian military professional environment (scale)

In Table 5 below, we can see that 74.2% believe that military ethics is maximally compatible with RoEs in place in Colombia. In comparison, only 0.3% believe that military ethics is not compatible with RoEs at all. It is, therefore, safe to conclude that most course participants consider military ethics to be extremely compatible with the standard operating procedures expected in Colombia.

Q: In how far is military ethics compatible with RoEs in place in Colombia?

Table 5. Compatibility of Military Ethics with Existing RoE in Colombia.

Scale		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Minimum compatibility	9	.3
	3	5	.2
	4	6	.2
	5	56	2.0
	6	49	1.7
	7	100	3.5
	8	222	7.9
	9	284	10.0
	Maximum compatibility	2097	74.2
	Total	2828	100.0

Does one have to act ethically even if the adversary does not?
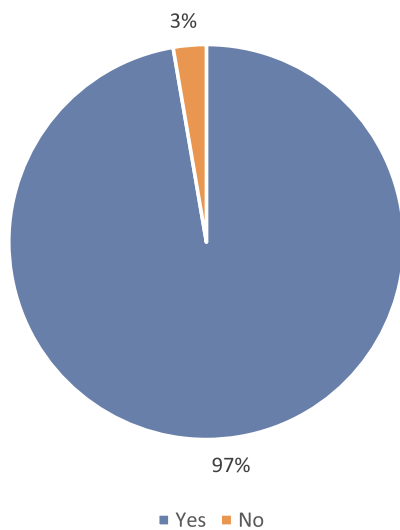
3%

97%

■ Yes ■ No

Chart 1. Obligation to Act Ethically.

To the question regarding the obligation to act ethically even if the adversary does not, we obtained the following results displayed in Chart 1:

This demonstrates that following the completion of the military ethics course, 97% of the respondents ($N = 2.828$) believe one must always act ethically, even if the adversary does not. This is an important indicator for the understanding of the necessity and importance of military ethics in military operations.

To the question "In how far military ethics facilitate compliance with Rules of Engagement" (rated on a 10-point Likert Scale), the results obtained are as follows (see Table 6): 81.3% (or 2.300) of the respondents have selected "very much," and only 0.4% have selected "not at all." Thus, the majority believes, indeed, that military ethics is generally very beneficial when it comes to compliance with Rules of Engagement. This is another important impact factor achieved by exposing the students to the military ethics course.

Another significant aspect of military ethics is related to its influence on inter – and intra-unit cohesion. The following tables (Table 7 and Table 8) display the opinion of Colombian officers on the subject matter.

Table 6. Does Military Ethics Facilitate Compliance with RoEs?

	Scale	Frequency	Percent
Valid	Not at all	11	.4
	4	4	.1
	5	23	.8
	6	28	1.0
	7	73	2.6
	8	151	5.3
	9	238	8.4
	Very much	2300	81.3
	Total	2828	100.0

Table 7. Military Ethics and Intra-Unit Cohesion.

	Scale	Frequency	Percent
Valid	No improvement	2	.1
	3	1	.0
	5	14	.5
	6	13	.5
	7	32	1.1
	8	104	3.7
	9	172	6.1
	Maximal improvement	2490	88.0
	Total	2828	100.0

Table 8. Military Ethics and Inter-Unit Cohesion.

	Scale	Frequency	Percent
Valid	Minimal improvement	2	.1
	4	2	.1
	5	15	.5
	6	17	.6
	7	34	1.2
	8	120	4.2
	9	214	7.6
	Maximal improvement	2424	85.7
	Total	2828	100.0

The above results indicate that military ethics improved *both* intra-unit cohesion and cohesion amongst units. 2.490 respondents, or 88%, selected "maximal improvement" in response to intra-unit cohesion; similarly, 2.424 respondents, or 85.7%, selected "maximal improvement" in response to inter-unit cohesion. This demonstrates that military ethics has important benefits not only on the battlefield. Here we can establish a direct relationship between proficiency in military ethics and inter – and intra-unit cohesion, a novel finding requiring further in-depth exploration. Moreover, cohesion is central to successful unit performance (MacCoun and Hix 2010).

Similarly, inter-unit cohesion is another important factor that we sought to explore. The perception of how military ethics influences inter-unit is overall positive, with 85.7% (2.424 respondents) believing that military ethics maximally improves inter-unit cohesion.

The next chart (Chart 2) shows how Colombian Armed Forces members perceive military ethics. 85% (2.403 respondents) believe that military ethics is universal, while only 15% (425 respondents) believe it is based on the (operational) environment. This is an important indicator for the understanding of the course materials. The course conveys general principles on acting in ethically challenging situations without considering which operational environment one is in.

Further, we have examined whether military ethics are based on religious beliefs. Again, we can see in Chart 3 that most of the respondents (77.5% or 2.192 respondents) believe that military ethics *indeed* comes from religious beliefs. This finding is perhaps not surprising given that prior to introducing the KCME military ethics curriculum, the training in military ethics received by the officers was based on Catholic Christianity (Comando General de las Fuerzas Militares 2016, 12–25).

Another related question was whether military ethics is based on cultural characteristics or not. The breakdown here is mixed, with 54.1% (1.529 respondents) answering

Is military ethics universal or environment-based?
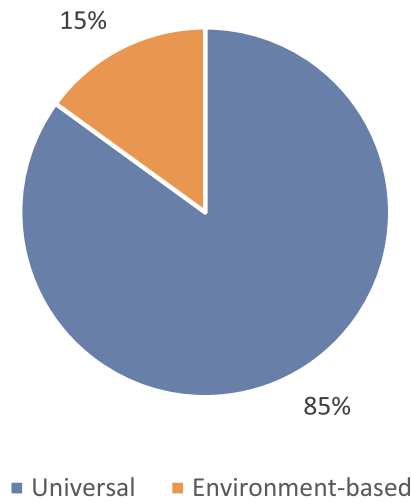
Chart 2. Universality of Military Ethics.

"yes" and the remaining 45.9% (1.299 respondents) believing it does not come from cultural characteristics (as shown in Chart 3 and Chart 4).

As far as the correlation between military ethics and military effectiveness is concerned, 80.3% (2.272 respondents) believe that military ethics is *positively* related to military effectiveness, while 19.7% (556 respondents) believe otherwise, as shown in Chart 5.

Does military ethics come from religious beliefs?
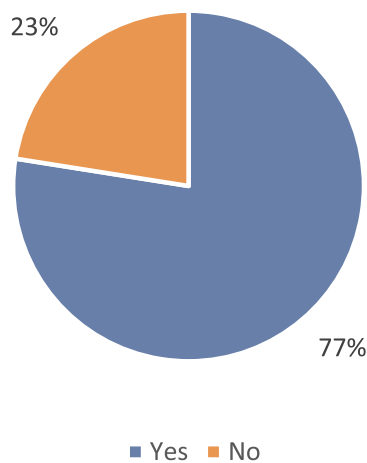
Chart 3. Military Ethics and Religion.

Does military ethics come from cultural characteristics?

No
46%

Yes
54%

■ Yes ■ No
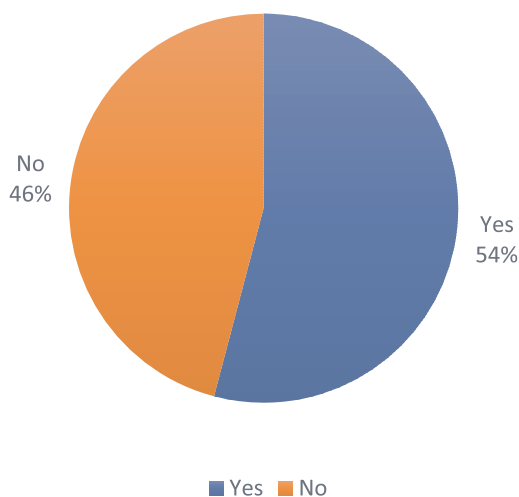
Chart 4. Military Ethics and Cultural Characteristics.

Is military ethics negatively correlated with military effectiveness?

20%

80%

■ Yes ■ No
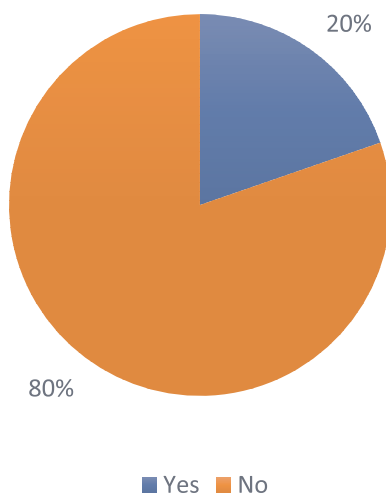
Chart 5. Military Ethics and Military Effectiveness.

Integration of the playing cards in 2020

As part of the military ethics curriculum, scenario-based playing cards have been developed to enhance self-study and help prompt classroom discussion. Tables 9–11.

Table 9. Evaluation of the Usefulness of the Playing Cards.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Yes	881	31.2	93.2
	No	64	2.3	6.8
	Total	945	33.4	100.0

Table 10. Perception of the Playing Cards on a 10-point Likert Scale.

|		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Not at all useful	7	.2	.7
	3	1	.0	.1
	4	5	.2	.5
	5	22	.8	2.3
	6	24	.8	2.5
	7	56	2.0	5.9
	8	154	5.4	16.3
	9	142	5.0	15.0
	Very useful	534	18.9	56.5
	Total	945	33.4	100.0

Table 11. Evaluation of Scenarios on a 10-point Likert Scale.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Not useful at all	7	.2	.7
	3	2	.1	.2
	4	6	.2	.6
	5	10	.4	1.1
	6	17	.6	1.8
	7	53	1.9	5.6
	8	164	5.8	17.4
	9	133	4.7	14.1
	Extremely useful	553	19.6	58.5
	Total	945	33.4	100.0

Q: Did you find the playing cards useful?

Q: On a scale from 1 to 10, with one being the least useful, how would you rate the playing card's role in supporting military ethics education?

Q: On a scale from 1 to 10, with one being the least useful, how would you rate the scenarios on the playing cards?

Discussion

As depicted in the results of the survey, the military ethics education package has had some overall positive impact. Most respondents perceived that military ethics taught during the course was compatible with the Colombian RoE. This means that the course content and the knowledge imparted can be incorporated into the Colombian context, which is particularly challenging given the fact that the ongoing conflict is taking place within Colombia's borders. Although there remain some doubts in relation to the connection of military ethics to culture and religion as depicted by the responses to the survey, there is no question about the usefulness of military ethics, and the fact that it is a practical subject rather than a theoretical one.

Notwithstanding Colombia's religious heritage and traditions, in 1991 and since the enactment of the Political Constitution of the same year, Colombia's government espoused religious freedom.[2] Hence, the Armed Forces should always guarantee the personal spiritual choices of its servicemen and women across military training. Thus, KCME's military ethics course adopts a novel, non-denominational approach to ethical discussions within the military domain. Through lectures, discussions, and practical exercises, the course promotes professional decision-making grounded in internationally recognised legal standards rather than personal beliefs or cultural idiosyncrasies. This makes the finding that the vast majority of the respondents thought that these values were grounded in their religious beliefs very interesting, highlighting that there is much overlap between different perspectives, whether religious or otherwise (Whetham 2018).

A neutral approach to military ethics is of great practical utility for militaries – such as the Colombian – that face complex intra-state armed conflicts in which adversaries are usually difficult to identify and ends, means, and methods are intricately intertwined. The persistent evolution of hybrid, unrestricted, and asymmetric warfare presents an ongoing challenge for militaries, necessitating not only the provisioning and upkeep of capabilities but also comprehensive training for leadership and personnel to effectively conduct peacekeeping operations (Sierra-Zamora and Castaño-Bedoya 2022; Villalba-Garcia et al. 2022).

Indeed, the majority also perceived that military ethics was not only able to improve intra – and inter-unit cohesion but also positively correlated with military effectiveness. In other words, ethical behaviour on the battlefield would not only ensure adherence to RoE but also improve the overall performance of the troops. All in all, most respondents who took the course understood that adhering to ethical principles of conduct is always a must, regardless of how one's adversary behaves. The introduction of the cards to enhance the military ethics online course and help practice the acquired knowledge proved to be a "force multiplier" for the students, the majority of whom considered the scenarios on the cards "very useful" or "extremely useful."

A look ahead

Due to the success and the increasing popularity of the course amongst Colombian military officers, and based on both data and word of mouth, other military educational institutions within Colombia, such as the Colombia Naval Academy, have expressed an interest in integrating the course. KCME will therefore seek to further deepen its collaboration with the Colombian Military Forces' educational facility to provide military ethics education to those at the early stages of their military careers.

Further, the course has managed to put military ethics at the centre of the educational spectrum, resulting in multiple outputs, including but not limited to conferences and joint publications dedicated to military ethics. These have an impact not only within Colombia but also in other Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America. Thus, also in this sphere KCME will continue to support all efforts dedicated to creating and

disseminating materials related to military ethics, especially focusing on Colombian Military Forces' experiences and regional case studies.

Conclusion

Overall, this article sought to depict KCME's efforts to introduce uniform military ethics education into the Colombian Military Forces. From the onset of the project, the military ethics course was integrated into an existing programme; however, this programme has been progressively replaced by KCME's online course, which offered not only flexibility but also novel contents and perspectives on the subject. This was especially important during the Covid-19 pandemic, enabling students to take part in military ethics education at their own pace.

Perhaps the most important illustration of impact is the data collected from the survey taken by those who had completed the course. The data shows that most respondents perceived the course, as well as the supporting playing cards, as very useful. This positive reception of the course has helped generate interest from other military educational institutions to integrate the course into their curricula which will be a project for the near future. Finally, the course helped create a forum for discussing military ethics with dedicated yearly conferences and joint research and publication. To this end, KCME will continue supporting the Colombian military's efforts by participating in conferences and participating in collaborative research projects.

Notes

1. For more information on DANTE, see Dirección de Aplicación de Normas de Transparencia del Ejército - Ejército Nacional de Colombia (ejercito.mil.co) (accessed June 24, 2024).
2. See, for instance, Colombian Constitution (1991), Title II, Ch. I, Art. 13 and Art. 19, available from: https://www.globalhealthrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/colombia_const2.pdf (accessed December 12, 2023).

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