**The Strength to Say No**

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Documentation Statement:

I did not receive help on this assignment.

Captain Justin Conelli was embedded deep in the Hindu Kush Mountains as a combat controller when he received a call from another patrol in the mountains that they were receiving fire from higher ground. The patrol went in pursuit of the attacker while Conelli called in two local helicopters to check out the area. Soon the helicopters reported back that an individual in the vicinity of the attack was spotted on a radio. In Conelli’s words “If someone is on a radio in the middle of nowhere there is a 98% change they are an enemy”. Hearing this information and worrying about his fellow troops in pursuit of the attacker, Conelli struggled with the difficult decision of whether to authorize an attack based solely on the information that the man is in the area of the attack and that he has a radio.

Struggling with the ethical dilemma of authorizing this man to be killed without first properly determining his status as a combatant, Conelli told the eager helicopter pilots to stand down. A few minutes later the other patrol reported back that they had captured their attacker and it was in fact not the man the helicopters had spotted. A few weeks later another patrol in the same area was attacked and a good friend of Conelli’s was severely wounded, it was the man that Conelli had refused to authorize a strike on that was responsible for the attack.

Having been in Conelli’s position it is possible that a very different outcome would have resulted. This is because the Utilitarian approach seems to better fit this situation than Conelli’s Rights approach. The Utilitarian approach is on that determines the ethical decision of a situation to be the one that causes the greatest good with the least amount of harm. Knowing that having a radio almost always means the individual is an enemy and to have this person in close vicinity to my fellow soldiers, it would have been easy to deem the death of the man more valuable than the possibility that he injures more soldiers. One powerful example is that after Conelli refused to authorize the strike, the man ended up wounding one of Conelli’s good friends. Had the Utilitarian approach been utilized the unnecessary injury of a fellow soldier could have been avoided and an enemy of 98% certainty could have been eliminated from the fight. The downside to this approach is that there is a chance that this could have been an innocent goat herder that once killed could have created a new generation of enemies.

Conelli’s Rights approach is not without its merit though. The rights approach, which bases ethical decision on how actions will affect individuals rights, allowed Conelli to look at the situation objectively and without clouded judgment and consider the implications of his actions towards the man he could very well condemn to death. He determined that the rights of the man outweighed the possibility of his malicious intent without further proof of his guilt. This was emphasized when the fellow patrol caught up with their attackers and it was not the man the helicopters had reported. The downside to his approach is the possibility that too many rights are afforded to the individual and his actions result in much greater harm to others without their rights considered.

While there are many approaches to how this situation could have been handled the Utilitarian approach seems like a much better way it could have been handled than the way Conelli chose to handle it. It is possible that the injuries of the fellow soldiers could have been avoided and that another terrorist could have been eliminated before he could have caused any additional harm. With the heat of battle making it difficult to make ethical decision under pressure it is important to have an ethical framework already decided upon. This preparation allows for decision to come naturally and without hesitation while under extreme pressure or duress.

**References:**

Justin Conelli, Capt, USAF