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Criteria for a Just War

“Good evening, everyone. Hope you had an enjoyable weekend. I hope it was a peaceful weekend, too, which ought to have prepared us for the topic this evening; we’re going to discuss war.

“Nothing generates more emotional trauma among peoples,” I told the class, “that experiencing their nations at war. Terrorist acts, hurricanes, earthquakes, tornadoes or even race riots, as devastating as their effects can be, normally don’t last long.

“But war, war lingers on, and on, bringing pain and sorrow to people, the more so nowadays when modern media communications convey to us the grief early in the morning and just before we retire for the evening. The pain and sorrow we feel, would increase exponentially if war were to take place within the nation’s borders, something that, fortunately, this country hasn’t experienced since the Civil War.

“There were times in ancient history, when war was the predominant means of conducting state affairs among civilized peoples on earth. Nonetheless, while non-violent activities today characterize the conduct of international affairs, wars in the last seventy years have been extremely lethal, largely owing to technological innovations in *weapons of life destruction*, ranging from machine guns and tanks to long-range land and sea artillery, aerial bombardment, missiles, bio-chemical weapons and atomic bombs.

“Of course, we can’t blame these weapons for the amount of destruction and the number of deaths they create. By far, the most devastating weapon of life destruction on earth has been, and continues to be, man himself, particularly political rulers. While they are not the ones who pull on the trigger, they command and order the use of these weapons, often with popular support and at times without any.

“Altogether, I would venture to say that most people in the world find war abominable, even if and when necessary, because the taking of another human being’s life is widely regarded, both by religious and secular minds, as highly tragic.

“So, if there’s agreement that the issue of war belongs in our dialogue on

moral and political values, we shall proceed to discuss the three wars our country is currently involved in. Yes, don't forget that in addition to Afghanistan and Iraq, and in spite of newly created euphemisms suggesting that the war on terror is over, we're still waging this war, and likely will continue to do so in the foreseeable future.

"This evening we're going to question the morality of war by focusing on what is known as the theory of *Just War*. The concept relies on human awareness and on the incorporation of moral principles that in turn would regulate human behavior and the application of military force.

"The term itself is mind boggling. The thought of justifying war seems akin to giving the green light to the greatest, and often, most calculated irrational behavior in our human repertoire. After all, war is one of those events that we tend to wish only upon our worst enemies, which is likely why we do so. And yet, even the side that justifies the use of force pays a heavy price for war too.

"We all wish that fighting a *Just War* would shield the *good side* of all the human suffering as well as prevent having to divert taxpayers' dollars into financing a war. Resources that instead could go into education, assisting the poor, re-training unemployed workers, reforming healthcare, protecting the environment, rebuilding our infrastructure, or simply be returned back to the taxpayers. Sadly, these wishes always fail to come true when it comes to war, which is why many seek to prevent it from happening in the first place.

"Mind you, wars are not only regulated by moral means. Moral values may have stopped many wars, but there are other elements at work, too. Fear, in my view, is a most important deterrent to war, and perhaps the most prominently instrumental cause of war in ancient history and today. What is *national security* if not another term for fear? National security sounds more important, I'll concede that; the term inspires protection and self-assurance. Yet, deep down, national security implies a concern, a fear, albeit a reasonable one given what lurks outside our borders.

"Although the term *national security* is terribly ambiguous and has been politically prostituted over the years, it does have its usefulness. It helps us to think about circumstances and peoples that could pose a threat to our well being. In the end, national security stands for policies and strategies that make us not feel insecure. The term makes us forget that we are afraid of others, or that at least we can, somehow, take care of ourselves.

"And while fear makes us prudent, as it should, just think of the many marriages, alliances, balance of power schemes, militarization of societies, wars of conquest, and aggressive wars throughout history that have originated out of fear: fear of being defeated by others if we were to allow them to become stronger; fear, not only of others' motivations, but of others' perceived intentions as well.

“So fearful man has been of each other that at times rulers have had to control external situations to make their surroundings more secure. Building an impenetrable castle to defend his people at times was not enough for a ruler; sometimes he had to go out of his own castle and destroy those he thought could one day turn against him.

“How can morality deal with fear of war and with an external reality that too often threatens us with war? And, should war be understood only as a means to assuage our fears by defending ourselves against the aggressor? What about undertaking wars to save people, to protect and keep innocent people out of harms way?

“These are some of the questions that we shall explore this evening. I’ve asked Mr. Wasserman to make a brief presentation of the issue. Mr. Wasserman, if you would.”

“Of course, I’ll start by mentioning that the concept of *Just War*, despite its wide appeal and adoption into modern international law, does find its critics. For many pacifists, for example, there’s no such thing as a *Just War*, since for them nothing justifies the taking of another human being’s life.

“The pacifist would tell us that his approach is not all that futile in regulating violence. He would point to how non-violence and martyrdom, as practiced by the early Christians, helped to bring down a mighty Roman Empire by questioning its legitimacy to govern; how Mahatma Gandhi’s non-violent approach triumphed over British rule in India; and how Martin Luther King’s reliance on a similar approach was instrumental in gaining significant institutional, political, and cultural victories for blacks in this country. Moreover, how can we forget, only years ago, how the Solidarity movement in Poland and other similar non-violent demonstrations in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union served as significant catalysts that helped to bring down authoritarian regimes in these countries.

“For the true realist, on the other hand, the idea of a *Just War* is a naïve and un-welcomed obstacle in the way nation-states interrelate with each other. Realists point to the existence of some sort of immutable *laws* that govern and/or condition the international arena, and which can only be ignored at our own peril.”

“Forgive me, I was not aware of the existence of these laws?” said Mr. Radusky.

“They are more or less referred to as *laws*,” replied Mr. Wasserman. “It seems that human propensity toward war has been observed for so long in international affairs that many have accepted that it’s an unchangeable part of human behavior.”

“Would realists oppose morality as a means to prevent war?” asked Mr. Dickerson.

“Realists would argue that since it’s in our interest to emerge victorious from war, it is best that we divest ourselves of that gushy goodness that is

morality that would do nothing but to weaken us in the international jungle that is world affairs. War, they would say, implies the deterioration of civilized order and the absence of morality, which means that seeking to introduce moral principles in international affairs are not likely to protect us from war.

“Anyhow, somewhere stashed between these two views, one that rejects war and the other one that rejects morality to a large extent, we find the concept of a *Just War* as a means to prevent warfare and reduce its possibilities as well as to regulate the course of military conflict right down to its very conclusion.

“The theory of *Just War*,” Mr. Wasserman continued, “in its most secular form, makes the following assumptions: that human beings are free and not completely conditioned or enslaved to external reality; that we are moral beings capable of making moral choices; that goodness exists to some degree in all, or perhaps, in most people, although it might need to be extracted, sometimes with some difficulty; that war is preventable, detestable, and should be avoided, and when not, its destructive consequences can and should be held to a minimum; and finally, that nice guys and gals don’t always finish last. In other words, morality appeals to the majority of people, and it does work.”

“Does it actually work?” asked a skeptical Mr. Edson.

“Well, given how many wars we humans have had to endure throughout the course of history suggests that rulers have done a lousy job at assimilating this concept. On the other hand, given human proclivity to violence and the fact that we have failed to destroy ourselves more often and more completely indicate that maybe we have heeded our consciences from time to time.”

“You mention that the theory of *Just War* is based on secular assumptions. I was under the impression that this theory had religious origins,” argued Ms. Bynum.

“You’re correct,” answered Mr. Wasserman. “However, although the theory of *Just War* is rightfully associated with Christian beliefs and values, concerns about the justness of armed conflict had been expressed since antiquity by pagans far removed from any religious influence, with the exception of pagan religion, of course. This tells us that moral preoccupation over war is not a unique religious issue.

“Let me provide you all with an example of pagan concerns with war. Cicero, the great orator and Consul in the Roman Republic who lived a few decades before Christ was born, already had expressed reservations about war being morally permissible under all circumstances.

“He prescribed principles that apply both to the reasons for going to war and to behavior during and at the end of the conflict. Let me read to you part of what he had to say about war:

The first office of justice is to keep one man from doing harm to another, unless provoked by wrong. The only excuse, therefore, for going to war is that we may live in peace unharmed; and when the victory is won, we should spare those who have not been blood-thirsty and barbarous in their warfare. [T]here is a limit to retribution and to punishment; or rather, I am inclined to think, it is sufficient that the aggressor should be brought to repent of his wrong-doing, in order that he may not repeat the offence and that others may be deterred from doing wrong.

As for war, it may be gathered that no war is just, unless it is entered upon after an official demand for satisfaction has been submitted or warning has been given and a formal declaration made. But when a war is fought out for supremacy and when glory is the object of war, it must still not fail to start from the same motives which I said a moment ago were the only righteous grounds for going to war.¹

“Note that Cicero did not object to wars being fought for glory. He was not the only one. During the times of ancient Greece and the Roman Empire, glory was a highly regarded norm that guided the conduct of states. Wars actually thrived under those norms. But norms change over time. Nowadays, only a fool or an insane dictator would fight a war over such superficially regarded values.

“We then jump a few centuries to St. Augustine, whom history attributes being the first one to set forth the basis of what is known today as the *Theory of Just War*. Let me read a quote from St. Augustine, and notice how minds meet despite different social norms and religious beliefs:

For it is the wrongdoing of the opposing party which compels the wise man to wage just wars; and this wrong-doing, even though it gave rise to no war, would still be matter of grief to man because it is man's wrong-doing. It is therefore with the desire for peace that wars are waged, even by those who take pleasure in exercising their warlike nature in command and battle.²

“In reality, Augustine didn't have much to say about the morality of war, although he affirmed the crude moral reality that sometimes man has no choice but to confront his enemy militarily. Nonetheless, his views allowed Thomas Aquinas eight centuries later to expand on the theory, whereupon eminent religious legal minds like Francisco de Vitoria, Francisco Suarez, and Hugo Grotius, among others, began to codify these principles during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, relying primarily on Natural Law.

“These legal minds developed the concept. Then, in the twentieth century, what once were religious views were incorporated—by the Hague and Geneva Conventions, and the United Nations—into secular principles regulating the conduct of states throughout most phases of war.”

“Thank you, Mr. Wasserman,” I said. “In our discussions on how you all should approach the topic, we debated whether we should elaborate a secularized version of the *Just War Doctrine* or the opposite, a religious one. Mr. Hunt, who will handle the core of the presentation, chose the religious version; could you tell us what led you to your decision?”

“Actually, my rationale was that most if not all of our elected leaders are said to profess Judeo-Christian beliefs and values, even those who are not too religious. It is my supposition that their moral beliefs play a significant role and may even influence their decision-making process. Thus, it stands to reason that we develop Gospel-based Just War criteria to evaluate war, and do so, particularly in light of changes that have occurred since the doctrine was originally formulated.”

“But, why not use the secular version if it would have a more universal appeal,” asked Mr. Edson.

“Because of the compelling nature of religious beliefs,” he replied. “Religious values are efficient only if they compel through moral authority; and, what higher authority than God. So, if we are able to discern those values that stem from the Gospel itself, it will be more difficult for those who claim to accept Judeo-Christian values to reject these guidelines.”

“Yes, but that means that those who are not Christians will not be bound by the theory,” said Mr. Edson.

“Not so!” exclaimed Ms. Lewis. “Those who don’t share in the Christian faith can rely on the Gospel as a philosophical document. Remember, there are moral principles in the philosophies of Plato, Aristotle, Plutarch, Confucius, Kant, or Hobbes that while not expressed in religious terms may still have universal validity. Besides, both religious and non-religious philosophies have borrowed from each other throughout the centuries.

“We see such synergism taking place nowadays. A secularly expressed morality, for example, is widely accepted by religious believers and humanists alike. You have the United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights; its origin is secular, but it has strong religious roots and support.

“So, those who profess different faiths or none altogether, may approach Jesus as a philosopher, too. What we might discover is that the religious version we’ll elaborate will have just as much legitimacy as if it were devoid of the element of faith; in other words, should they want to, it will be just as easy for a Muslim, a Jew, a Buddhist or a humanist to accept these guidelines from a secular standpoint as it was for the international community to incorporate legal principles whose foundation, although profoundly religious, extend beyond any spiritual faith.”

“Okay, let’s try setting the foundations of a *Just War* theory. Mr. Hunt, this is where you come in.”

“Yes. I’ll start by saying that this was not an easy exercise, sir,” he said. The challenge was to try to reconcile the core-values in the Gospel and elaborate a doctrine of *Just War* that is rational and morally feasible. Initially, I thought about relying on the Beatitudes as a source of Christian values. The problem I found was that their interpretations have been privatized by the various Christian denominations and ideological currents, which means that it is difficult to find common grounds as the basis for their understanding.³ Therefore, I chose instead to extract other common values over which there might be less controversy.

“For example, focusing on Jesus’ own life would tell us that his behavior reveals that when he faced his enemies he willingly chose a submissive or passive path for himself; he did not resort to violence when he was apprehended. The question is whether he ordained that his behavior be emulated by all who would follow him in the years and centuries to come and under all circumstances. My conclusion? It would seem so, but we need to see what else he said.

“Jesus’ principal commandment next to loving God was to love one’s neighbor. Not only to love one’s neighbor, but to do so as you love yourself. This concept suggests that only if you hate yourself so much you might be able to get away with not having to love your enemy. And, there have been, as we know, rulers who have hated themselves so much, that they have taken their hatred upon their own people and upon neighboring countries.

“One thing I don’t like about Jesus is that I think he enjoyed making things difficult. I mean, he could have left it at that: love your neighbor; but No, he had to add more contradictions: *love your enemies, do good to those who hate you*. I mean, these words seem to leave no room to wiggle. The words indicate, quite clearly, that he or she who calls himself a Christian should not bring harm to one’s enemies.

“And just to make sure that we got the message, he gave us the means to love one’s enemies: forgiveness. How many times? Seventy times seven, meaning unlimited number of times. It now makes it doubly difficult to get away from having to love one’s enemy. And it’s by this time when Jesus probably looks back and sees how the masses begin to thin out; his commandments become too unbearable. Just to think that we have to give up all that gusto we derive out of seeing my enemy suffer. No wonder many think Jesus was nuts.

“Nonetheless, I think Jesus had his own reasons for asking us to behave in such a peculiar manner. I’m sure we all have seen that bumper sticker that reads, *God created me, and God doesn’t create trash*. Well, that’s pretty much on the money, I think. For those who believe, human beings enjoy a special status by virtue of having been created by God.

“And, it stands to reason that you just don’t take something that is extraordinarily valuable and break it and throw it away. And that’s what happens when there’s war; we kill each other and, since we’re no longer good dead, we bury

each other; we throw each other away.

“Now, let’s round up the issue of Jesus’s view on war. There’s this beatitude that keeps swirling on my mind: *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.* No matter how many different interpretations one gives to this pronouncement; whether it means to be at peace with God, with one another, with himself, Jesus didn’t say, blessed are those who are at peace; he said, blessed those who *seek* peace, those who make peace happen.

“Could it be that he only referred to those who seek peace for themselves? It sounds so selfish, so individualistic, so non-Jesus like. Could it be that he was referring to those who only sought peace with their backyard neighbors or among his social circle of friends?

“Did he not seek to include the world’s Caesars and their inhabitants as those who had the responsibility to seek peace as well? Could the same Jesus who commanded Christians to love their neighbors and their enemies have been so remiss, so indifferent to war, that he would not want human beings to avoid war?

“The term *peace* means something very specific. Sure, it means, among other things, the absence of disorder or civil disturbance, the lack of anger and hatred, a state of internal tranquility. But it also means the absence of war, violence, armed hostility.”

“Are you suggesting that Jesus was a realist in the sense that he accepted the fact that war was going to happen no matter what?” asked Mr. Dickerson.

“Something like that,” replied Mr. Hunt. “If Jesus praised those who make peace, it must have been because he expected that some people were going to pay lip service to his commandments. It seems reasonable to conclude, as you say, that Jesus expected that war was going to afflict humankind. But, unlike natural disasters over which humans have little or no control, Jesus thought or knew that preventing war was quite possible, thus, he praised peacemakers.”

Mr. Dickerson was not entirely satisfied, so he kept pressing Mr. Hunt. “Let me ask you, let’s say that Christian ethics command heads of states to conduct themselves properly in their domestic and international affairs. This means that they will be sensitive to the concerns of other nations; that they will respect their own citizens; that justice and peace will be foremost goals in their foreign policy, and so on.

“But, what happens if in spite of acting properly and ethically, a nation still faces the imminence of war? Is there anything it can do to prevent war? Aren’t its leaders under a moral obligation to look after the well being and the security of its people?”

“Of course they are!” replied Mr. Hunt. “The problem is that well-being and security are terms that can be defined in very different ways depending on the situation at hand. Jesus’ commandment would dictate that governments should try to do as much as possible to deter war. Human prudence would tell us that deterrence may be accomplished by entering into pacts and alliances or

by developing the military means to discourage an aggressor. Sometimes, however, such alternatives might not be feasible and appeasement or surrender might become the wisest of all viable policies in order to avoid unnecessary bloodshed, and I'd like to underscore the word *unnecessary*."

"Wait a second, *surrender*?" asked Mr. Edson.

"I realize that you raise this question from the perspective of the United States being the most powerful military nation in the world, Michael, which means that we never surrender, right?" said Mr. Hunt.

"But think about this. If you're five feet tall and wish to oppose a six foot bully who's haunting or threatening you, you may want to risk your own life if you happen to be driven by self-pride, fear of being humiliated, or if you think that you have nothing to lose anyways. But if you're the head of the family and all that your opposition to the bully would bring about is the possible death of your children and your wife, then, depending on the circumstances, surrender might not be a dishonorable or immoral alternative. It all depends on how you define what well-being and security mean to you and the circumstances surrounding you at the time."

"If I may intervene for a minute," said Captain Francis, "let's not forget that as head of the nation, you're responsible for the well-being and security of all the citizens. And if you're Kuwait, Austria, or Poland and the opposition is called Saddam Hussein, Adolph Hitler, or Stalin; or if you're Hungary or Czechoslovakia, the opposition is Moscow, and no one comes to assist you; or if you're the United States and the opposition is not only Hanoi, but a large sector of the American people opposes you, too, well, avoiding unnecessary bloodshed until the tide turns may be a respectable and moral—not to say prudent—decision.

"Political leaders, I think, should never try to personify the nation and its citizens under these circumstances."

"Thank you, Captain, that was most timely," I said. "Please, go on Mr. Hunt."

"Getting back to the main issue, does that mean that under no circumstances may a nation repel an aggressor? What about helping another nation that is being attacked? Is there is anything in Jesus' words that could possibly compel us as Christians to engage in that which goes against his own commandments?

"I believe there is, and the answer, I think, lies in Jesus's own apparent contradictions. We know what it means to love one's enemies, but, what exactly does it mean to love one's neighbor as much as you love yourself, particularly from the perspective of the political leadership? Doesn't it mean to protect the lives of the citizens, to ensure their well-being, to do as much as possible to keep them from harms way?

"Again, let's use the analogy of the head of the household. What parent would not try to protect his or her family from danger if there were means to do so? Isn't it love and responsibility what compels the parent?

“Also, the money or time you all donated to help the victims of Katrina went to people you didn’t know, which means that moral responsibility to love one’s neighbor has nothing to do with geographical distance or kinship. And one would hope that in the case of political leaders, Jesus’s commandment will have nothing to do with party affiliation.

“In the end, this commandment should not have anything to do with sentiments either. Although it’s nice to have them, feelings do falter at times. So, at least the way I interpret Jesus’s commandment, having to love one’s neighbor ultimately may require a willful act to do that which we might not feel like doing, or that which we have been commanded not to do: taking the life of one’s enemy.

“You’re supposed to love your enemy, even forgive him. But you’re also supposed to love your neighbor. Under very specific circumstances, these two imperatives can become, indeed, a zero-sum proposition. If you opt to love your enemy, you may end up hurting those you’re supposed to love, and vice-versa. So, how does one begin to reconcile a square and a circle while keeping the features of both?

“You start thinking in terms of a polygon. You do as much as possible to prevent war; which at times may entail appeasement or surrender; at other times, an alliance or military build-up. But, at other times, deterrence may no longer be possible, and the result is war.”

“You’re saying that you’re given two directives,” said Mr. Edson, “and you opt for loving one’s neighbor over loving one’s enemy. I have to presume that opting for the former is not arbitrary. Does that mean that both don’t carry the same weight, that love of neighbor is far more important?”

“Yes,” replied Mr. Hunt, “but I don’t think such a decision should imply a casual disregard for loving one’s enemy, unless we believe that Jesus had nothing better to do with his time. Having to love one’s enemy goes against our human nature; it’s not only a radical concept, it’s a violent one! I think this was Jesus’ litmus test on war. He was giving us an indication of the extent beyond which we have to go before we could accept war.

“This view coincides with the rationale behind the modern Christian version of the *Just War Theory* in which war is regarded as a last resort and as an essential condition for justifying military action. And, it may be no small coincidence as well that, procedurally, the concept of war as a last resort has become incorporated into the United Nation’s secular charter.⁴

“So, Yes, love of one’s neighbor becomes more important, but for an obvious reason that all human beings likely will appreciate: the innocent and the just, particularly in God’s Kingdom, have precedence over the guilty and the unjust, even though God may continue to love both.”

“Thank you, Mr. Hunt,” I said. “Now, let’s move into the next phase of the

exercise: identifying the principles that make up the *Just War Theory*. Ms. Lewis, Mr. Wasserman, and Captain Francis, I believe you have the bulk of the presentation at this time.”

“Thank you,” said Ms. Lewis. “We are going to identify the main principles of the *Just War Theory* and describe some of the challenges they present in trying to accommodate the theory to current political reality.

“The very first principle behind the Theory of Just War is that *the cause or reason for committing the nation to war must be a just one*. This principle requires that the external conditions and circumstances that guide the leadership on its decision to wage war or to support armed conflict be reviewed and considered in light of Gospel-based values.

“Particularly nowadays, the widespread availability of public information and means of communications allow the government and its citizens to gain first, second, and third-hand knowledge regarding the issues that may lead the nation into war. Although this collective knowledge may be tainted by misperceptions, flawed intelligence, predisposed attitudes, or disinformation, it still serves as the essential elements of a most critical decision.

“Because so much is at stake when it comes to war, the government bears the responsibility to carefully examine and share with the public enough information to allow citizens to express their views, particularly if support is being requested before committing the nation to war.

“At the same time, it must be realized that there may be instances in which the leadership might not have sufficient time to inform the public of its decision either because of the secretive nature of the military operation or because the immediacy of the threat would not allow it. In any case, the leadership is always morally, and possibly legally, responsible for failures in this regard and should be held accountable within reason.

“As knowledge of the conditions and circumstances surrounding the decision to engage in war becomes available, such information needs to be carefully reviewed and discerned by the leadership and the citizens. The primary means to discern whether shedding the blood of American soldiers and that of our opponents is a just venture will always be one’s individual conscience, collectively expressed through the political leadership and the citizenry.”

“One question, if I may,” said Mr. Brandon. “One’s conscience is a pretty intangible element. How reliable is it as a means to decide upon something as crucial as going to war?”

“That is precisely the purpose of the *Just War* criteria, to help government leaders and citizens to evaluate the information at hand. We all heard Mr. Hunt provide the Gospel-driven view of the theory as it relates to war. Those values that Mr. Hunt identified facilitate our review and allow us to make personal judgments about the circumstances leading the nation into war.

“For example, the first limitation we face with discerning a *just cause*, assuming the information surrounding the circumstances is accurate, is that

justice tends to be in the mind of the beholder. There are elements that may affect the political leadership's judgment and predispose the conscience of its citizens thereby distorting a *just cause*. Among these are ideology, political expediency, fear, self-interest, ethnocentrism, and self-righteousness, just to name a few.

"Thus, responding to an attack brought about by another nation following years of abuses by the attacked nation doesn't indicate the presence of a *just cause*. On the contrary, the nation initiating the attack might be justified in seeking to end years of injustice.

"Likewise, stirring covert unrest within another country and following with a military intervention to install a government in power that is more favorable to one's interests under the rationale of stabilizing the situation, also cannot be regarded as a *just cause* to resort to war, the reason being that human lives are being used for political ends.

"Ambiguity and subjectivity while evaluating the national conscience may be considerably lessened by a review of our common national values—what we consider to be our moral ethos—and by disciplining oneself to remain open-minded and willing to receive and review as much information and criticism as necessary. In other words, a national dialogue is extremely important whenever war is being considered.

"Further, internationally accepted principles of justice, such as those incorporated into the United Nations Charter and the Geneva Convention, provide a blueprint of the *modus operandi* that we as a nation have chosen to accept and which may also serve as guidelines to decision making.

"In the end, if the political leadership and its citizens truly believe in abiding by a Christian-based theory of *Just War*, it will define a *just cause* as one the leadership decides, not on the basis of a narrow interpretation of its national interest that can be vitiated by any of the elements I just mentioned, but by reconciling the rules of the international community, our national values, the domestic needs of our citizens, the needs of others, and the values that are spelled out in the Gospel.

"This is not a matter of religious or moral piety but a rational commitment on the part of the political leadership and the citizens to be bound by that which they say they believe in. After all, isn't this what followers of political parties or religious ideologies usually would do?"

"Any questions?" said Ms. Lewis. "Yes, Mr. Dickerson."

"What happens if the political leadership manipulates those elements you mentioned and end ups rationalizing a *just cause*?"

"Uh, good question," she replied. "Presumably that can happen."

Upon seeing Ms. Lewis hesitation, I intervened. "Yes, for sure it can happen. However, let's not think that there's an easy way out. The leadership may,

indeed, arrive at a misconceived notion of a *just cause*, but it's not this principle alone that decides whether a war is *just* or not; it's marking *Yes* on all the principles on the checklist. So, even if the president is able to manipulate the reason for going to war, he still would have to meet the other principles as well."

"Thank you, sir," said Ms. Lewis.

"The second principle in the *Just War Theory*," she continued, "was significant in the past but, in my view, has lost much of its relevance today. I'm referring to *the need for wars to be lawfully declared by a lawful authority*."

"The reason I say that the concept has lost relevance nowadays is because there is always the possibility that oppressed groups constituting themselves in some sort of liberation fronts may wage *Just Wars* against their oppressors inside the country or across borders.

"These groups, of course, likely wouldn't enjoy formal legal authority to declare a lawful war. Nonetheless, the United States, for example, would want to review the justness of a guerrilla war to determine whether it would be ethical or not to extend its support to the group. We must remember that Spartacus was only a slave who led a rebellion against the Roman Empire. He neither constituted a lawful authority nor could he have legally declared war. Still . . .

"Another problem with this principle is the need for there to be a declaration of war. As we will see, the *Just War Theory* allows for the possibility of an ethically justified preemptive attack; that is, an unannounced, undeclared, sudden assault against the opponent.

"Initially, the significance of a declaration of war in *Just War Theory* was based on denying the attacker the possibility of a surreptitious attack, because in the old days such action was not considered too honorable. However, a justifiable preemptive war not only negates a lawful declaration of war; it makes a declaration of war somewhat of an oxymoron. Mr. Wasserman, your turn."

"Thank you, Ms. Lewis. Let's see, the third principle states that *the leaders' motives for waging war must be morally good*. This principle is as significant as it is problematic. Insofar as adequate and reliable information becomes available, it is possible for government officials and citizens to judge the justness of a cause.

"In the case of us citizens, however, how do we gain access into the conscience of those who decide to wage war in order to find out if they are well intentioned? This poses a real problem in a democracy because citizens find themselves at the mercy of the political leadership's competence and honesty in revealing their intentions and disclosing information to the public."

"Well, not only that, but what may we regard as morally good intentions? Isn't that kind of subjective, too?" asked Ms. Bynum.

"In a manner of speaking, yes," replied Mr. Wasserman. "That is why we

rely on what our elected leaders tell us about their intentions for going to war. These intentions refer to the ultimate ends that are being pursued; to the outcome the leadership expects out of the war. So the leadership's intentions become public through their disclosure of the reasons why we go to war.

"Along these lines, if a pursued outcome can be reconciled with Gospel-based values, provided the leaders meet the other principles in the theory, this criterion would be found to be acceptable. For example, if President Bush would have said that he was attacking Iraq in order to ensure the continued availability of oil supplies for the American economy, I don't think his intentions would pass the test, even if the American people were to support him, the reason being that we would be attacking another nation in order to appropriate its resources for our own use."

"One question," said Mr. Edson. "What about if the political leader deceives the nation, the people buy into his deception, and we end up fighting an unjust war?"

"That's an issue that was heatedly debated with regard to Iraq, wasn't it, Michael?" replied Mr. Wasserman. "If we were to find out that, indeed, there is deception on the part of the leadership at the time hostilities begin, things tend to get very messy, both politically and morally.

"On one end, the leadership could be held legally or constitutionally accountable for its misdeeds. At the same time, the entire political leadership and the citizenry have the moral responsibility to review the situation to find out if bringing an unjustified conflict to an end would be possible without triggering circumstances that may result in an even worse crisis."

"Thank you," said Mr. Edson.

"Next principle, *war must be the very last resort after other alternatives have been exhausted*," said Mr. Wasserman. "This is understandable; someone who claims to abide by Judeo-Christian values realizes that war is not and ought not to be an immediate response to conflict; that, instead, war should be avoided as much as possible.

"Now, as with the concept of *just cause*, this principle is a bit complex, too. Its observance requires having to incorporate significant elements into the leadership's decision-making process, among them, reliable information, timing, viable alternatives, a scope analysis of the threat posed by the enemy, and the personal discipline, courage, and willingness to make decisions on the basis of one's beliefs."

"Can you make it a bit easier for us to understand what the heck you're saying?" said Mr. Edson.

"I'll try. Under most circumstances, both the government and its people receive public information that allows them to observe how conditions begin to unfold to the point when war becomes potentially imminent. This window of information actually may be quite large; the only time I can think of a

situation that would not allow enough information would be that of a surprise preventive nuclear attack that is not preceded by any show of animosity or hostile actions by another government.

“Other than that, during a crisis, the principle of war as a last resort requires the leadership to focus on actions that minimize rather than exacerbate tensions. The leadership should be engaging in actions that would tend to diffuse the crisis rather than in warmongering rhetoric and/or provocative behavior.

“Needless to say, we must be mindful of the mental state of the political leaders and the population at a time when we are considering the possibility of going to war. There’s usually a considerable level of apprehension and uncertainty that trigger emotional, psychological pressures that, even when hidden—or precisely because of these being hidden or repressed—could result in less than well-thought and well-planned decisions and alternatives. In other words, decision-making under high levels of stress or pressure can lead to disastrous courses of action, not only on the part of the political leadership; in a democracy, the risk becomes even greater when the citizenry is involved. While leaders are afforded the opportunity of being somewhat more rational and more detached, the citizenry is not typically given to these ‘eccentricities.’

“Another potential problem is that overconfidence could lead the leadership into without considering potential avenues to prevent war. Also, you have the opposite condition, one in which overstated fear may lead political leaders into surrendering, recklessly thereby appeasing the enemy, or ordering a preventive attack.

“Timing is also extremely and morally significant. Once all diplomatic possibilities have been exhausted and it becomes the collective conscience of the leadership that war is imminent, it is morally incumbent upon the political leadership to wage war under most propitious military terms. We must bear in mind that rushing into war without being militarily ready and possibly losing a justified war can be morally reprehensible.

“Initiation of justified hostilities also should be delayed until the government feels capable of waging war successfully. Moreover, the government may opt for delaying hostilities if doing so could considerably weaken the enemy and possibly avert war. On the other hand, circumstances may require a sooner rather than a delayed attack if intelligence information dictates the imminence of war.

“Another important element is the scope of the threat that the enemy presents. War as a last resort means that we don’t necessarily initiate military conflict if another government bad-mouth us, expels one of our diplomats, burns an effigy of the president or even desecrates our national flag. Why? Because there are corresponding ways to deal with these acts. As repulsive or unspeakable as these actions may be, war is far more destructive and more repulsive.

“Not observing the principle of war as a last resort evokes the times when glory and honor were considered more significant than human lives. Today, we expect our elected officials to possess the necessary self discipline, courage, and willingness to abide by those values they claim to uphold.”

“Thank you, Mr. Wasserman,” said Ms. Lewis as she signaled Captain Francis to continue with the presentation.

“This next principle relates to the outcome of a war. It states *that the political leaders must see to it that any war they start is planned in such a manner that success must be reasonably assured.*

“Although it is understood that a successful outcome can never be guaranteed, this principle suggests that once the decision is made to go to war, careful attention needs to be paid to all elements that usually affect the outcome. These include not only appropriate military planning, but international and/or domestic political support, release of accurate public information, and a review by the leadership of all possible negative repercussions following the attack along with plans to mitigate their effects. The most important consideration involving this principle can be stated in reverse: it is morally wrong to begin a war whose successful outcome cannot be reasonably assured. This is why the planning stages are so crucial.

“The rationale behind this principle is that *just wars* are only fought to defend oneself from an unjustified attack or to defend those who have been unjustly attacked or treated. The implication is that carelessly engaging in war in a manner that sacrifices the outcome is morally reprehensible and political leaders should be held accountable for their failures, particularly if failure to attain the war’s objectives leads to a worsening of the situation.

“At the same time, this principle requires the understanding that a successful outcome may not necessarily imply having to completely annihilate the enemy. Victory needs to be understood in terms of fully attaining the initial objectives while inflicting the least amount of destruction.

“Further, in a democracy, the leadership always has to take into account two unreliable partners during wartime: citizens’ political support and the economy. When an ongoing war doesn’t go well, no matter how much support they may have promised the leadership at one time, voters may desert their leaders.

“For example, the American people, who initially were quite supportive of the war in Iraq, became President Bush’s *Runaway Bride*, having left him for the most part at the political altar when the war was not ending as was expected. This suggests that the electorate is an unreliable partner that the leadership can’t take for granted. Interestingly enough, President Obama, a critic of the Iraq war, appears to be experiencing a very similar situation with respect to Afghanistan, a war that, as we shall see later on, met several attributes of the *Just War* theory. When such a loss of domestic political support

takes place, one concern is that, seeking to turn the tide in their favor, political leaders may opt for short sighted, expeditious solutions that instead lead to even more critical errors.

“The other unreliable partner is the economy. If the war effort brings about disruptions to the economy, the leadership will hear from voters as well.”

“Captain, you’re suggesting that public support and the economy are moral elements in the *Just War Theory*?” asked Ms. Williamson.

“No, not that these are moral elements, but that they are real constraints that political leaders need to take into account. In other words, it would be foolishly immoral to begin a war without the support of the citizens. A war, after all, is not only about soldiers dying; it’s about children, parents, brothers and sisters, nephews, grandchildren, and friends dying. So, shouldn’t the leadership ask permission to conduct a war to those who will risk losing a loved one?”

“Moreover, while the American people understand that freedom and the material benefits and security derived from our standing in the world are not free, they very much want a sensible return on their money. And, war is economically costly; people don’t necessarily enjoy seeing their hard earned dollars going to a war that promises no end in sight or one that is poorly fought. Eventually, these expectations may force a government to come to terms with itself as we all learned from the Vietnam experience.

Captain Francis continued. “The next principle that must be met according to the *Just War Theory*, states that *prior to the leadership engaging in armed conflict, consideration must be given to plans for a just and fair peace among all the parties in the conflict*. Such consideration involves reconciling a realistic assessment of whether the initial war objectives have been attained regarding establishment of a just settlement in accordance with Gospel values. Such settlement, however, sometimes may be quite harsh and may involve bringing the opposition’s leadership’s to account before legal tribunals.

“Along these lines, it is important for our citizens to understand that in victory our government and our people are required to treat enemy soldiers and the civilian population with compassion and fairness.”

“Why should we do so, Captain?” asked Mr. Edson. “I mean, fighting a *just war* indicates that we’re not responsible for the conflict.”

“You’re right, that’s what it means,” answered the captain. “Nonetheless, we have to be mindful that so-called enemy soldiers and civilians are often forced to fight and/or show their support toward an unjust war. In other words, many of them might not be in agreement with the conflict; they may be innocent parties who may have little choice but to tow the leadership’s line. Such recognition, by the way, is observed in principles contained in The Hague and Geneva Conventions to guide the conduct of nations during and after the cessation of hostilities.”

Captain Francis then looked over his notes and continued. “I would like to briefly discuss the morality of three important types of wars at this time, because they can be vital in our understanding of the theory. We have first, what is known as a *Preventive War*, and there are two scenarios under which such a war may take place: one, in which the government initiates military conflict under the reasonable belief that war, although not imminent, is deemed to be inevitable and would involve greater risks if postponed; the other one, in which the leaders foresee eventual threats by another nation or group and, even though no conflict is imminent, they decide nonetheless to take early action that would favor the odds of victory as opposed to confronting the enemy after it becomes better prepared militarily.

“Neither one of these scenarios would be morally justified by the *Just War Theory*. As a matter of fact, not even the United Nations Charter legitimizes a *Preventive War*. Article 51 in the Charter makes it very clear that, only if attacked, may a nation engage in war as an act of self-defense.”

“May I ask what ethical rationale is there for a preventive war not being morally justifiable?” asked Mr. Brandon. “From my standpoint, it makes a lot of sense to me that if I foresee a threat in the near future I would want to deal with it before it explodes in my face.”

“It does appear to make sense,” replied Captain Francis. “It would also seem to make some sort of sense for me to shoot you if I happen to think that some day you might want to kill me, wouldn’t it? The problem is that what seems to make military sense may not necessarily make ethical and practical sense”

“But wouldn’t the ethical and the political and military strategies collide,” demanded Ms. Williamson.

“Not at all!” replied the captain. “What the ethical guideline seeks to accomplish is to prevent you from implementing policies that are unethical—meaning politically and militarily reckless—but without sacrificing the nation’s security. The purpose behind this principle is precisely to avoid unnecessary bloodshed. Let me explain.

“From a military standpoint, it wouldn’t be difficult to show why a *Preventive War* cannot ever be morally justified, much less by Christian-based values. The basic premises for a *Preventive War* are beliefs, assumptions, suppositions, intuitions, expectations, premonitions, even partial information, that an enemy state may attack you some time in the future.

“Driven by fear, expansionist desires, insecurity, or on account of power struggles, political leaders would then decide to act by anticipating events that *may* or *may not* materialize. In other words, they would make a calculated guess—take a gamble—while using human lives as betting money, without any certainty that the enemy will, indeed, attack you.”

“Does that mean that in order to meet *Just War* criteria we may have to take

it on the chin first?" asked Mr. Edson.

"I understand how you feel, Michael, and it's, indeed, a tough one to accept," replied the captain. "Nonetheless, think about it from a different angle. To begin with, Preventive wars not only do not meet the last-resort criterion, they are not even a first-resort action; we're talking about anticipating the *possibility* of an action, which is why Preventive wars trivialize human lives, ours and the enemy's, the innocent as well as the evil ones.

"Even one of the most prominent scholars from the Realist School has acknowledged the extent to which public opinion has changed against preventive wars:

*It is especially in the refusal to consider seriously the possibility of preventive war, regardless of the expediency in view of the national interest, that the moral condemnation of war as such has manifested itself in recent times in the Western world. When war comes, it must come as a natural catastrophe or as the evil deed of another nation, not as a foreseen and planned culmination of one's foreign policy.*⁵

"One major problem with the concept of Preventive war is that it dilutes legal and moral institutional restraints on warfare and replaces them with a sort of *if-they-can-do-it, so-can-we* mentality; everyone would want to do the same! How can we pretend that our world, our nation, will be more secure if we proceed in this fashion?

"Far from contributing to world security, Preventive wars tend to heighten insecurity because they transfer the causes and origins of wars from specific evil deeds to vague elements such as perception, hearsay, and uncertainty; Preventive wars shift the responsibility of conflict from specific human actions, such as an attack, to emotional conditions such as anxiety or suspicion. In other words, distrust, which is inherent in world affairs, is not enough of a moral reason to start a war, just like one simply doesn't shoot a person he dislikes because he thinks that eventually he might be attacked."

"That's how President Bush proceeded in Afghanistan and Iraq!" yelled an irate Mr. Edson.

"Not true!" claimed Ms. Bynum. "Don't you read the newspapers? Those were preemptive actions; there's a difference, you know."

"I believe I've been unceremoniously interrupted," remarked the captain.

"Yes you have," I said. "It was most unfortunate and rude. Please, Captain, proceed."

"Thank you. Actually, I was about to discuss preemptive war. A *preemptive attack*, is one in which the national leadership becomes aware that an attack by an enemy nation or a group is about to take place, and the targeted nation beats the other to the punch; you anticipate your opponent by doing to him what he was going to do to you, had you not done it first.

"The term *preemptive warfare* became part of the nuclear warfare strategic

vocabulary once it was determined that both Moscow and Washington had the capability to deliver nuclear missiles against each other in a very short period of time. Thus, if one of the powers somehow realized that the other one was going to fire missiles against it, it would seek to prevent the attack from happening by launching its own missiles first, hoping to destroy the enemy's weapons before they could be fired.

"Setting aside the question of whether a nuclear attack can ever be justified, since it involves the massive killing of civilians, in conventional warfare, this strategy would fall under the category of a morally justifiable defensive attack, because all you're doing is defending yourself from an impending strike. The difference in moral terms between a *preemptive* and a *preventive* attack is that in the former there's awareness that an attack is imminent. In the case of a preventive war, there's only the probability, or possibility, that an attack may take place sometime in the future.

"The other category of warfare is one in which the government doesn't participate directly, meaning physically, in the conflict but encourages it or actively supports it by supplying weapons and/or any other type of logistical assistance to one of the warring parties. Many call this type of military conflict *proxy wars* because someone else does the fighting for you. The question is whether this type of war would be justified under the *Just War Theory*."

"I would think not," replied Ms. Williamson. "If we can only exercise limited influence over the forces we support, how can we guarantee its outcome or how do we know how those we support would end up behaving themselves? Besides, fighting a proxy war is kind of cowardly and hypocritical; you don't want to get your hands dirty, you don't want others to know, so you let others do it on your behalf."

"Well, Ms. Williamson, let's think about what you just said," replied the captain. "Think World War II, 1939, 1940. Germany had invaded Poland and much of Western Europe. The United States had seen its friends being attacked and became involved in the war by sending military equipment and providing logistical support to the Allies. Moral or immoral? Weren't the Allies involved in an unprovoked defensive war?"

"Or, suppose that a low intensity conflict begins to take place in the Sudan while the United States is in the midst of fighting wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. We believe that it is just and fair that we intervene to defend innocent populations that are being slaughtered or driven from their homes. But we realize that we cannot stretch our military personnel any further, so we decide to provide logistical support or financial assistance to others to do the fighting. Moral or immoral?"

"Very well," she replied. "Does that mean that the morality of proxy wars obeys different criteria?"

"No. Within the framework of the *Just War Theory*, proxy wars are simply wars like any other. By this I mean that we have to apply the same criteria we

apply to any other type of war. Are the causes just? What are the intentions underlying the parties involved? Perhaps neither party is justified, and we have to act as arbiters!

“Or those whom we support, are they the good guys? How do we know? Are the parties involved in a war of attrition that will last for years? Does the conflict meet the ‘war as a last resort’ criterion? Only then can we pass judgment and decide whether we’re morally justified in supporting one side of the war or not.

“That’s it,” said the captain. “Those are the categories of war according to how they begin. Oh! I almost forgot, Ms. Lewis, I believe you had asked me to briefly deal with the conduct of the political leadership and the military throughout the war. Should I do it now?” asked the captain.

“I think so,” I said. “We might as well describe these principles now and then jump to the practical portion of the exercise.”

“Very well, then, just briefly, let me go over these. We have spoken already about one of these principles: *civilians not considered part of the war effort cannot be targeted*. Right away we notice the many difficulties that begin to ensue. On the one hand, some will say that individuals working within the military-industrial complex are civilian-soldiers and may be rightfully targeted; others will correctly attest that in many instances, particularly as it relates to authoritarian governments, civilians are forced to support the war effort by working in military-related industries.

“We also touched upon soldiers, guerrilla fighters, and other types of combatants who dwell or hide among civilians, seeking to manipulate the good guys’ war ethics to their advantage, hoping that civilian populations along with them will be spared. These are limitations, no doubt, in our ability to deal with the enemy, and frankly, there are no easy answers.

“But, we must remember our collective values. As a society, we didn’t justify the killing of innocent people in Waco, Texas, while law enforcement authorities pursued those wanted by the law. Well, from the standpoint of Christian-based values, there’s no difference when it comes to innocent people; innocent Americans are neither more innocent nor more deserving to live than innocent civilians in other countries. We’re all the same in the eyes of God.”

“Is that view supposed to offer us comfort?” asked Mr. Edson, again conflicted.

“It’s always harder on the good guys, Michael, that’s why they earn the title of ‘good guys,’ said the captain.

“Let me go to the next principle,” continued the captain. “*Just War Theory* requires that the use of military force be proportional to the wrongfulness or injustice that led to the initiation of the conflict. Actually, this is a principle

of law that we observe in the United States: the punishment should fit the crime.

“The objectives that *Just War Theory* pursues are to restore conditions to what they were before the conflict started, to ensure just reparations, and to prevent recurrence of the incident.

“Meeting these objectives may signify having to disarm or regulate the enemy’s weapon production, limiting the scope of its military activities, forcing fair reparations, or even removing the leadership from power. What this principle seeks to avoid, however, are those excesses that war tends to engender through hatred and revenge and that quite often go beyond rightful and fair punishment and justice.

“The idea is to prevent more harm through the use of force than what the use of force itself seeks to accomplish. It certainly doesn’t mean that the same amount of military power used by the enemy should be utilized to defeat him. Thus, a military strategy based on the preponderance of force, as opposed to a lengthy war of attrition, might be morally adequate if it shortens the war and reduces the killing.

“One word of caution, proportionality also relates to the incident itself. This means that not all actions by the enemy necessarily warrant a military reply or the indiscriminate targeting of innocent civilian populations. This last stipulation is very important, for too often our responses are rather expeditious and we end up following policies that, not only tend to diminish the value of human life, they create animosity and attitudes of revenge among the civilian populations that we are assisting.

“For example, it has been alleged that any discussion of proportionality must embrace an overall calculation of the entire conflict in which *any civilian lives lost must be balanced against civilian lives saved*.⁶ One immediate problem we face here is that this principle follows the same rule of thumb as preventive wars: having to rely on guesses or estimates of what might happen in a future that neither political leaders nor combatants can control.

“Moreover, this principle subtly allows the targeting of innocent civilian populations in the hope that, in the end, a greater number of innocent lives on our side might be saved. But, this view reflects two standards of human life, one that applies to the enemy’s civilian population and another that applies to our own. That is, we need to kill enough civilians on the enemy side to force them to surrender, hoping that if they do surrender it will save lives on our side. Would this strategy work? It very well could, except that it we would be using innocent human lives as pawns in the war. Is there any moral rationale to support the view that numbers dictate morality in this case?”

“Well, there’s a practical one,” replied Mr. Edson. “Better their dead than ours; after all, we didn’t start the war. It’s the enemy’s responsibility to look after the well being of its citizens; they should bear the moral responsibility, not us.”

“In other words, punish the innocent while punishing the bad guy; is that what you’re suggesting?” said the captain. “A practical objection to this method is that the reason bad guys are bad is because they do not care for the well-being of their citizens. We know that, yet we fall into an impractical aspect of an otherwise unethical behavior: our action makes the enemy look like the good guys. The bad guys will allow such punishment of their population to go on as long as possible, hoping that world reaction would become unfavorable against the good guys. At the end of the conflict, the supposed good guys end up being the bad guys. Get it, Michael?”

“What else. Oh, let me say a few words,” said the captain, “about the principle that in my mind makes the most and the least sense from a moral perspective: the humane *treatment of enemy forces by our military personnel*. We know that there are international laws governing this aspect of warfare. Nonetheless, have we ever asked ourselves if they are logical, if they make sense from a moral standpoint? Why should we care for those who unjustifiably try to kill us while seeking to destroy our way of life? Isn’t this a sissy way of fighting a war?”

“Consideration, compassion, mercy, fairness; aren’t these attitudes that we need to show toward our troops? After all, they’re the ones risking their lives for us! Aren’t they doing enough already? Why then should we burden with niceties that could weaken their sense of honor and their morale?”

“So, what if they exceed themselves at times? Can we blame them? Haven’t we trained them to kill, and do so with utmost efficiency? Isn’t that the object of war? Isn’t that how we win wars by killing more of them than they kill of us?”

“If the enemy hadn’t done what it did we wouldn’t be attacking them.”

“Captain, you’re beginning to make sense,” said Mr. Edson. “However, now I’m a bit confused, again, of course. I’m thinking, the *Just War Theory* is sentimental politics. All this stuff about loving those who want your head—no disrespect to Jesus—but to what extent is it helpful, or advantageous, or convenient? Is it stately? Are we likely to lose a *just war* over sentimental reasons?”

“I understand,” replied the captain. “I said that some of these principles, particularly this last one, would appear not to make sense. So, let me argue the other side of the coin by saying first, that any ethical principle that presumably contributes to defeat in a *Just War* is impractical and unethical. We must remember that one of the principles of the theory is that there must be reasonable assurances of a successful outcome.

“When President Bush admitted that one of the worst mistakes in the Iraq war had been the Abu Ghraib prison abuses, I can guarantee you that he wasn’t talking sentimental politics; he was articulating the practical considerations of an ethical principle to which we as a nation are committed.

“Whether that makes us idiots or not is something that is up for debate, at

least according to one senator from Oklahoma. You see, terrorists don't feel ashamed when they behead, burn, and drag the bodies of our soldiers through the streets. And you can bet that their interrogation methods do not comply with the Geneva Convention, as we witness what happens to our soldiers when they are caught by terrorists in Iraq.

"When terrorists act like terrorists, we criticize them for their barbaric behavior; we find their actions to be abominable. So, what happens to our shame, our credibility, and our honor when we start behaving similarly?"

"Ethical considerations are far from being gushy morality; they have a strong practical component. Failing to abide by a code of ethics tarnishes our credibility and our image internationally. It questions our values before the eyes of the world that can now argue that we're no better morally than the enemy we fight.

"For those who say, 'so what?' let me tell you, there are two things that you try to seek in a modern war: you try to maintain and nurture international support for your cause because you don't want to end up, unnecessarily, as the Lone Ranger. The Lone Ranger image is not even idealistic, it's downright dumb. And when we rationalize the need to engage in the practice of abusing prisoners, next thing you know our people start demanding shortsighted, unethical solutions that may leave us even more vulnerable to international criticism.

"The second element is that you don't want to strengthen the enemy's morale, much less its numbers. In an era of instant video communications, the killing of civilians or the abuse of prisoners will generate strongly motivated and hatred-filled terrorists as quickly as corn kernels burst open and become pop corn inside a microwave oven.

"Statesmen and politicians fail to realize that when the good guys fight a war they are really engaged in two conflicts: one is the physical conflict; the other one is the moral battle, the one whereby we project and defend the principles over which the war is fought. In other words, a *Just War* inevitably involves the nation's credibility, inevitably portrays an aura of legitimacy regarding the war. This principle is about not contradicting our nation's values. It's about loathing barbaric behavior, thus about not acting like barbarians. And we must remember, barbarians tend not to value human life the way we do.

"So, I hope you appreciate that this principle, Michael, is an extension of our nation's values; it's a representation of what we are and who we are in the world. Is it important that we abide by a different set of rules that makes us different from the other side in all respects? You better believe it!"

"I'm with you, Captain," replied Mr. Edson. "My concern is that many politicians and war planners consider moral principles to be nothing more than platitudes that distract from the war effort. I'm afraid that if you walk into the War Room at the Pentagon or meet with the president to discuss war, and you try to inject these views they might simply look at you from the corner of their eyes and think you're nuts."

“You may be right,” I said, involving myself in the discussion. “However, wouldn’t that project us in a negative manner? Are you aware how long it takes to plan a war? It takes years! And, it takes months to prepare for one. So, my question, then: given their significance at a time of war, shouldn’t moral considerations be taken into account, too? If war is at times inevitable, why can’t we have sessions on moral strategies? Why are we humans so lax towards the innocent? Why in the process of pursuing the guilty do we sacrifice the innocent, who for all practical purposes we stand for?”

“I think it’s because it’s our innocent we care about, not theirs,” replied Mr. Edson.

“To an extent, that may be so, Mr. Edson,” I said. “But, don’t forget that our innocent soldiers also die in wars. Besides, isn’t that kind of a having a double standard of morality? I think it’s very unfortunate that many politicians and pundits analyze a war only from strategic and political angles while setting aside its ethical implications either because they don’t consider these sufficiently important or mistakenly believe they are unrelated to politics. When the ethical is divorced from the political, that’s usually when serious political mistakes tend to happen. Captain, please, continue,” I said.

“Thank you. Having said that morality is important, we also have to realize the environment in which our soldiers operate. They are trained to kill and to do so efficiently. But have we asked ourselves who these soldiers are?”

“Aren’t they your regular NASCAR fans; your high school or college graduates; people who enjoy having a barbeque with their families along with a beer now and then; someone who grew up attending Sunday services, has a girl friend and expects to own a small business after the war; someone who comes from a small town or a large city?”

“We’re talking about men and women who normally would prefer to be watching a football game or going to the movies than being in the midst of a war; we’re talking about your average Joe who up till now doesn’t carry war scars and has no reason to want to kill someone else.

“We’re not talking about your prototype killing machine but individuals whose training takes place within a safe environment where there is no risk of being killed. Then, all of a sudden, we transfer them into real action where virtual reality and security disappear. Once in the field, they not only are supposed to kill efficiently, they also are supposed to show ethical restraint when being shot at or when seeing buddies being blown into pieces. So we have to understand that if there haven’t seen more abuses in our wars it is not because our soldiers are some sort of robocops, which of course, they’re not.”

“Thank you, Captain,” I said. “It’s now time to wrap things up for the evening. Ms. Lewis has provided all of you with summaries of tonight’s presentation. Next week, we will utilize all this information on a practical exer-

cise. I believe that you will find that there's certainly much less subjectivity on Gospel-based values than I anticipated which, when combined with the information we have, should provide a reliable approach to evaluate, pass judgment if you will, on the wars our country is now engaged in. So, until then, have a good evening."

Endnotes

¹ Cicero, *On Duties*, Book I, Translation by Walter Miller, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1913), on line.

² St. Augustine, *The City of God*, Book XIX, chapters 11 & 12, translated by Rev. Marcus Dodds, American Edition, 1887, on line edition.

³ See the Gospel of St. Matthew, verses 3-10. Some interpret these norms of moral conduct in a very individualistic and passive manner; others give the Beatitudes an external or social interpretation. Yet, others spiritualize these rules of conduct to the point whereby the believer might not even need to interrelate with others and still claim their observance. Many have rejected ascribing these values to people who find themselves in circumstances similar to the Beatitudes, because they do not partake in the faith; thus, innocent Muslims who mourn the death of relatives killed in wars, or Jews who are persecuted and insulted, or humanists who may be clean of heart, are not, according to this view, part of those Jesus intended to praise. Others do the opposite; they believe that God feels a great deal of compassion for those who are materially poor, those who are humble, or those who are merciful, although this view gives God the credit for granting people the grace that enables them to bear their condition or for behaving in accordance with Jesus' words.

⁴ See Charter of the United Nations, Chapters VI and VII.

⁵ Morgenthau, Hans, *Politics Among Nations*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Fifth Edition, 1978), p. 232.

⁶ Rivkin, David B. Jr. and Casey, Less A., "Israel Is Within Its Rights", *The Washington Post*, July 26, 2006. Note: My comment in the text does not refer to the article itself on the rights of Israel to attack Hezbollah in Lebanon.