

# Ethics



JUST WAR THEORY: APPLICATION IN LIBYA Recent military actions by the US and NATO in Libya have stirred controversy among Western nations, and people in asking whether the approach is necessary, effective, and most of all just. Previous engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan have cast a shadow of doubt across the justification behind foreign intervention in corrupt nations, due to the damage caused by expanding the scope of the war. In Libya, however, there is a clearly stated goal of protecting civilian lives. The controversy still remains, however, as world leaders including presidents Barack Obama and Nicolas Sarkozy insist that Libyan autocrat Muammar al-Gadhafi must go. Many see this as a call for military action against the regime just like the removal of Saddam Hussein in Iraq and the Taliban rule in Afghanistan. Whether or not this situation counts as a just war has been discussed at length, with the conclusion pointing to the affirmative.

According to a summary on the International Relations page of Mount Holyoke College, the just war principles are seven-fold. These can briefly be described as requiring a war to be fought as a last resort, declared by legitimate authority, fought to redress wrongs, fought with a reasonable hope of success, declared with a goal of peace, and must use proportional force while differentiating between civilians and combatants (Ferraro). At first glance, these guidelines are soundly followed. Bishop Howard Hubbard of Albany, writing on behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, found that the just war theory indeed saw no violations in the current conflict in Libya, but he also warned that the coalition must keep focused on its goal of protecting civilians. The mission, under the auspices of UN Security Council Resolution 1973, has a written purpose of establishing a ceasefire in order to defend civilians (US Bishops). This satisfies two of the

guidelines immediately, and the delay on beginning military action also suggests that all other options were exhausted. The wrongs being redressed were several accounts of violence against civilian targets by the Gadhafi regime, although loyalist forces also were attacking armed rebels. NATO, the US, France, and the UK all qualify as legitimate authorities, and thus another guideline is met, and in addition, they have a quite reasonable hope of success due to the combined strength. The remaining guideline in question is the use of proportional force. NATO's overall capability of force far outweighs that of the Libyan military, a conclusion drawn from the simple logic of comparing the size of several nations' militaries against that of Libya. However, the coalition forces are using restraint, and thus have only used air and sea strikes while avoiding placing troops on the ground to directly overpower Gadhafi's forces. Thus, the force is definitely proportional and not overwhelming, as only enough to protect civilians is used, but not enough to topple the regime. Some insist that the war in Libya is not just due to the ambiguity of the coalition's goals. A Princeton professor pointed out in the *The New Republic* that the war lacks support of many nations around the world, including the Arab League and the African Union who desire more restraint. He also implied that there is no end in sight for this conflict, and thus action was made without proper planning. Finally, he believes that the humanitarian benefit of the war is not great enough to merit military intervention (Waltzer). However, a missing element in these statements is that the war, in being unjust, violations the Just War Theory. In no way does the professor argue that any principles are violated, and thus he fails to invalidate the intervention by those standards. Overall, although controversial, the coalition forces in Libya display complete but delicate

adherence to the Just War Theory. Works Cited Ferraro, Vincent. " Just War Principles." Mount Holyoke College. Web. 19 Apr. 2011. . Michael, Waltzer. " The Case Against Our Attack On Libya." The New Republic. 20 Mar. 2011. Web. . " US Bishops: Military Intervention in Libya ‘ appears to Meet’ Key Just-war Standard." CatholicCulture. org. Trinity Communications, 28 Mar. 2011. Web. .