

The ethics of war and the war in iraq



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We are here tonight to talk about the ethics of war. Now to some minds this phrase “ the ethics of war” will likely cause raised eyebrows. “ The ethics of war? What can ethics possibly have to do with war? Isn’t war evil? ” Well, of course it is. War is a terrible thing. The existence and prevalence of war in history is, in fact, ample testimony to the depravity and wickedness of Man. The conduct of war involves the intentional killing of human beings and the destruction of property.

War inevitably causes untold suffering. I do not think that any rational person can ever say without qualification that war is good. War is something that we would all rather do without. And as Christians it is our earnest hope that someday God, in his mercy and grace, will beat every sword into plowshares and eliminate war from the face of the earth. But that day has not yet come. For Americans, who have lived in relative peace and safety for many years, war has become an unpleasant reality recently.

We have experienced the horror of September 11, 2001, and we face the threat of more such terrorist attacks everyday. In the wake of this injustice, our nation has begun a war on terrorism that has eventuated in the ongoing military actions in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Though most Americans and most Christians support the general war on terror, questions have been raised about our decision to invade Iraq, and public support for the continuing involvement of American forces there is steadily eroding. So, we may ask the question: “ Should we continue to fight the war in Iraq? ” And many of us are still asking the question of whether or not we should have gone to war there in the first place. Yet, there are even deeper questions

that remain: “ Isn’t war evil? Can there be such a thing as the ethics of war? ” Throughout history, Christians have often asked these kinds of questions.

We know that Jesus told us to love our enemies and to do good to those who mistreat us. He said, “ Turn the other cheek? ” How can Christians (or anyone for that matter) condone or participate in war for any reason? This is the main question that we will address today. Though we may all admit that war is a terrible thing and hope that wars will cease from the face of the earth, may there nevertheless be an ethical justification for war? What, specifically, should be the Christian position on war in general and on the current war in particular? In this lecture, I will defend the view that war is sometimes justifiable, and that when war is justifiable, Christians may ethically participate in that war. Moreover, I will also argue that the war in Iraq is a just war. Two Christian Perspectives on War Traditionally, Christians have defended two competing perspectives on the question of war.

First of all, though it has been the minority view in church history, many Christians advocate pacifism. For example, such Christian groups as the Amish and the Mennonites have historically been pacifists. Pacifism, of course, is the view that we should not participate in war. War is wrong and so we should not engage in it for any reason. There are several varieties of pacifism, but for our purposes here we will distinguish two forms of pacifism. First, there is universal pacifism.

This is the view that it is wrong for anyone, whether Christian or not, to participate in war. Second, there is Christian pacifism, which allows that non-Christians may sometimes morally participate in war, but it is wrong for

Christians to participate in war. Most Christians in history have rejected pacifism in all its varieties. They have instead advocated what is known the Just War Theory. On this view, it is recognized that war is generally evil. Nevertheless, it is sometimes just and right for a person, even a Christian, to participate in war.

On this view, in other words, it is possible to have a just war, a war that is morally justified. It should also be said, though, that on the Just War Theory (JWT), only one side in any given war can be just. That is, in any and every war, at least one side in the war is fighting unjustly. Of course, it is also possible that both sides in a given war may be unjust. But, to reiterate, there can never be a just war in which both sides are justified in fighting the war. At least one side in any war will be unjust.

When we look at the criteria for a just war later, this will become more clear. Now I have already indicated that I believe that war can sometimes be morally justified. So, it should be obvious that I reject pacifism and embrace the JWT. So let me now turn to discuss pacifism in more detail and explain why I reject it and why you ought to reject it too. An Evaluation of Pacifism Let me first address Christian pacifism, the view that Christians should not participate in war, though it is morally permissible for non-Christians to do so.

In other words, those who advocate Christian pacifism recognize that human government has a responsibility to protect its citizens from harm, and that this governmental responsibility may require that a country go to war to fend off foreign aggression. In such cases, those who hold this view would say

that most citizens of the country (the non-Christian citizens) can go to war, but not the Christian citizens. Why would someone hold to this position? Ordinarily what is permissible for people in general is permissible for everyone. If it is just and right for the non-Christian citizens to fight off a foreign invader, why would it be wrong for Christians to help out? Well, according to Herman Hoyt, one defender of this view, the reason is that Christians have a special calling in this world from which war would be an unacceptable distraction. Says Hoyt, Inasmuch as true Christians are “not of this world” (Jn 17: 16), but have been chosen by Christ out of the world (Jn 15: 19), it is the divine purpose to keep them from the evil in the world (Jn 17: 15). One of those evils is the exercise of physical force to accomplish the purposes of life.

This includes the use of force in times of peace and also in times of war. (War: Four Christian Views, p. 32). He goes on to say, “Witnessing for [Christ] to the salvation of souls. .

. is the supreme business of the church. . . . Believers were to give themselves unreservedly to this task.

Military service would exhaust their time and effort” (War, p. 41). For Hoyt, the idea that Christ’s kingdom is not of this world and that our weapons are spiritual, not carnal, together with the evangelistic mission of the church, make it the case that military service is prohibited for the Christian. This view has, it seems to me, several fatal flaws. First, though the Christian is certainly a citizen of God’s kingdom, a kingdom that is not of this world, the Christian is also a citizen of the earthly nation in which God has placed him.

Christians have a dual citizenship and are called by God's word to subject themselves "to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake" (1 Pet.

2: 13). This would seem to imply that Christians should support any just cause that their nation may have including any just war (assuming there is such thing). Second, this position presupposes that the only purpose that Christians have in this world is evangelism. But such is not the case. We are called to be salt and light in the world, to have a positive impact on the culture around us, to work, for example, for social justice.

If this is so, then why can't a Christian participate in a just war if that contributes to making the world a better place overall? Third, we need to ask why military service would be any more distracting from the Christians call to witness than any other secular vocation? Being a plumber or a banker or a lawyer is as time-consuming as military service. And just as one can witness for Christ in the civilian workplace, what is it about military service that would prevent one from witnessing for Christ in the Army? Don't soldiers need to be evangelized? Fourthly, what happens when and if a nation's population happens to consist of mostly Christians? On this view, then, only the small minority of non-Christians could morally participate in defending the nation when it is attacked. Surely, this cannot be right. Indeed, can we imagine any government, forced to defend itself against foreign aggression, exempting the majority of its population from military service on such grounds? I think not. But, what of universal pacifism? This view holds that it is wrong for anyone, Christian or non-Christian, to engage in war.

Certainly this view avoids the bizarre and inconsistent consequences of Christian pacifism, so it has at least that in its favor. But, why advocate a universal prohibition against war? Christians who defend this view look to the teachings of Jesus, primarily in the Sermon on the Mount, in which he enjoins his followers to non-resistance to those who mistreat them. For example, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, “Blessed are the peacemakers. . .” He also says, “Do not resist him who is evil, but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also.” And he says to “love your enemies and do good to them.

” Well, what about it? Do these texts require us to be pacifists? No. The first thing we should note is that these statements by Jesus were directed toward Christians, not to everyone in general. So, at best, these biblical texts could support Christian pacifism, but not universal pacifism. But, in any case, there are reasons to doubt that these texts support any kind of pacifism. For one thing, it is generally recognized that Jesus uses in the Sermon on the Mount a figure of speech called hyperbole—an intentional exaggeration in order to make a point.

For example, elsewhere in the sermon Jesus tells us that if our right eye causes us to stumble into the sin of lust, then you should pluck it out! We know this is hyperbole because nowhere else in the New Testament do we find so much as a hint that the early church took it literally. In fact, in Colossians 2: 23, the Apostle Paul tells us that such “severe treatment of the body is of no value against fleshly indulgence. Likewise, then, we may ask whether Jesus, when he said “Turn the other cheek,” literally intended us to take this as a prohibition against any and all resistance to evil. Did he mean,

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for instance, that it would be wrong for me to use force to defend my wife against the violent attack of a rapist? ” I seriously doubt it. For another thing, we should take careful note that Jesus’ instructions in these biblical passages are directed to individuals. That I, as an individual, should turn the other cheek does not tell us that the government should turn the other cheek.

As I will argue in a moment, the government has a God-given function to administer justice. So, even though you and I as private citizens are called upon to not resist the evil person, the state has no such pacifistic calling. There are some other points that pacifists might raise in order to justify either Christian or universal pacifism from a Christian perspective. Someone might ask, for example, “ How can Christians participate in a war when the people on the other side might be Christians, too? How can a Christian kill other Christians? ” Well, this question assumes that a Christian may fight in any war. But, if the JWT is true, then Christians (and everyone else) may participate only in a just war.

Which means that if Christians are on both sides of a battle, one of them is making a mistake. One of them shouldn’t be there. One of them is doing an unjust action, and there is nothing in the Bible that says that Christians are exempt from the consequences of doing wrong in this life. But what about killing unbelievers, the non-Christians? If we kill them in war, then we are sealing their eternal destiny; we’re sending them to Hell. Should Christians participate in war, killing people who are without Christ and sending them to Hell? This is a hard question, no doubt.

But if, as I will argue momentarily, it is right and just for nations to defend themselves against unjust aggression just as it is right for individuals to defend themselves against violent attackers, then this objection loses its force. Nowhere does the Bible teach that evildoers should be exempt in this life from the consequences of their actions. And if I kill another person in war who is unjustly seeking to kill me and my fellow citizens, then the fault is his, not mine. He should not have been doing what he was doing. So, I conclude that there is no biblical basis for pacifism. Indeed, as I will now argue, there is a very strong biblical basis for the JWT.

A Defense of Just War Theory In Romans 13: 1-4, the Apostle Paul has this to say about the governing authority (the state): Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore, he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God, and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. For rulers are not a cause for fear for good behavior, but for evil.

Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same; for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid, for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil. Paul tells us here that the governing authority is “ God’s servant. ” And this servant of God has the God-given responsibility to “ bear the sword” and to “ bring punishment on the wrong-doer” (v.

4). Clearly, the government is sanctioned by God to maintain order and justice within society, and to defend the lives of its citizens against those who would unjustly take them. And, by clear implication, this would mean that the state has the right and responsibility to engage in war if its citizens are threatened by unjust aggression from another nation. We can add that the justification for war can be likened to the justification for self-defense.

In Exodus 22: 2, we read: “ If a thief is caught breaking in and is struck so that he dies, the defender is not guilty of bloodshed. ” The teachings of Jesus on turning the other cheek notwithstanding, self-defense against life-threatening violence is not prohibited by Scripture. Likewise, nations defending themselves against foreign aggression is not prohibited either. What’s more, it is perfectly legitimate for Christians to participate in this function of the state.

If it is good and right for a government to protect its citizens even to the point of waging war, then why can’t a Christian participate in this good function of government? I see no reason why not. In fact, when we look elsewhere in the New Testament, we see this view confirmed very clearly. In Luke 3: 14, we see a reference to some soldiers who were converted under the ministry of John the Baptist. They came to John and asked him what they should do now. Apparently, they thought that their new-found faith required of them some “ spiritual” service and their resignation from military service.

However, John told them, “ Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely—be content with your pay. ” In other words, John said, “ Be good soldiers! ” So Christianity is not pacifistic, but clearly supports the JWT.

Nevertheless, even though Christians may support and participate in war, all Christians (and all people generally) should agree that not just any war is justifiable. There is a higher law than the state. We answer first and foremost to God and his moral law. So, we should not blindly follow the leadership of our government when the war drums are beaten.

The God-given job of government is to establish and maintain justice. But, governments often fail in this duty. Sometimes governments act unjustly. So, whether to condone or participate in a war requires careful moral reflection. In what follows I will set out the criteria that scholars of past ages have established for evaluating the justness of any given war. Then I will look at the war in Iraq in light of those criteria.

The Traditional Criteria for a Just War There is, as I have mentioned, a strong tradition in Christian history that Christians may condone and even participate without guilt in a just war. Though war is always evil, and those who start wars are evil, not everyone's participation in a war is evil. The Bible does, after all, permit self-defense when one's life is threatened by another person. Likewise, it is certainly justifiable for a nation to defend itself against aggression. That being so, those defending themselves are not doing evil in fighting the evil aggressors in war.

So, it is possible, in some circumstances, to justly wage war. But just what are the criteria for a just war? There are several criteria, and just war theorists have held that each one of these criteria must be met before it is morally permissible to wage war. First, there must be a just cause. Not just any reason for war will do. Certainly, a war designed to take the property of

another nation, or to kill its citizens because they are hated by the attacker, is an unjust war.

Traditionally, the only just cause that has been recognized by just war theory is a war of self-defense against an invasion of one's own country or that of an ally. So, for example, in World War II, when France, Britain, and other nations were attacked by Nazi Germany, they had a just cause to wage war against Germany. We must be careful not to interpret this criterion too narrowly, however. As stated, the criterion would, strictly speaking, justify war only after an aggressive attack has been launched. However, just war theorists have generally agreed that a nation may justly engage in a preemptive strike in order to defend itself in the face of a clear, though merely imminent attack by a foreign aggressor. A good example of this can be found in the Israeli Six-Day War.

When Israeli intelligence learned that the Egyptians and Syrians were poised to launch a military attack on Israel—and that attack was known to be imminent and certain—the Israeli armed forces launched a preemptive strike that devastated the military forces of their enemies and prevented Israel from being invaded. Just War theorists agree that this preemptive strike was justified under just war criteria because the heart of the criterion under discussion is the right of self-defense, and it would have been foolish for the Israelis to follow the letter of the law and await the actual attack of the Egyptians and Syrians. This proviso on the first criterion is all the more important in our age, when nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction pose a real danger to the very existence of any nation attacked

by them. No nation can afford to wait for an actual attack before taking action if the attack will likely involve weapons of mass destruction.

So, we will understand the first criterion for a just war to allow for preemptive attacks in the face of real threats by aggressive nations. Before I move on, however, I want to raise the question of whether or not there might be still other just causes for going to war. The traditional just war theory, as we have seen, only recognizes self-defense as a just cause for war. But there are some just war theorists (myself among them) who believe that war may be justified on other grounds. Keep in mind that the reason why self-defense is considered a just cause for war is because an aggressive attack on one's nation by a foreign army is an act of injustice.

That is, at the bottom of the issue of just causes for war is the theme of justice. And it seems to at least some just war theorists that the interests of justice vis-a-vis war go beyond the interests of self-defense. Consider, for example, the invasion by NATO of Bosnia several years ago. The Serbs, under the direction of their President Slobadan Milosevic, engaged in a horrific campaign of genocide against the Muslims in Bosnia.

NATO forces (which included U. S. forces, by the way) invaded Bosnia and put an end to the genocide. On traditional just war criteria, it is hard to see how this was a just war. After all, the Serbs had not attacked any NATO country, nor was any such attack being planned.

Yet, most of us, I think, would consider the actions of NATO morally justified. This suggests that the traditional criterion of a just cause (self-defense) is inadequate. A more adequate criterion would allow as well for what we might

call a moral crusade—not a religious crusade, but a moral one—in which a nation is justified in going to war in order to redress a significant injustice (such as genocide) being done to people of another nation. This point would be controversial even among just war theorists, but I think that it is worthy of our consideration. Secondly, the war must be waged by a legitimate governmental authority.

Private citizens have no right to wage war against another nation even for a just cause. A properly established government (or some officially sanctioned arm of the government) must officially declare the war and sanction the military actions taken. So, for example, we should say that the Irish Republican Army, the terrorist group fighting the British in Northern Ireland, even if they have a just cause, are not fighting a just war because their actions are not sanctioned by a legitimate governmental authority. Likewise with most other terrorist groups.

Third, war must be the last resort. War may be justly waged only after all peaceful means of adjudicating grievances between nations have been exhausted. Avoiding bloodshed is always the right thing to do if it is possible. Consider, for example, the First Gulf War. When Iraq invaded Kuwait, many weeks were spent by the U.

S. and the U. N. trying to find a diplomatic solution; trying, that is, to get Saddam Hussein to withdraw his forces on his own.

Failing that, the U. S. -led coalition went to war—but only because peaceful means were unable to redress the injustice done to Kuwait. Fourth, there must be a reasonable hope of success. Even if one has a just cause,

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legitimate governmental sanction, and has tried to resolve the conflict peacefully, it may still be unjust to go to war. If waging the war would clearly be futile and only result in further unnecessary bloodshed, it would be unjust to go to war.

The idea here is that surrender to an aggressor is the right course of action when there is no reasonable hope that resistance will repulse the invading army. A case in point here might be the initial Polish resistance to the Nazi invasion in 1939. The German tanks were met with a terribly inadequate Polish army, including old-fashioned horse-cavalry. There was no hope of success, so the Poles should not have resisted. Fifth, there must be a rational proportion between the goal and the price to achieve it. Suppose that there is reasonable hope of success in waging war against an aggressor.

Still, it may not be just to fight that war. For example, what if success can be achieved, but only with the devastation of one's own country, the loss of (say) 90% of your military forces as well as many civilian lives, and the crippling of your economy for decades to come? In such a case, the cost of success is irrationally disproportionate to the goal. A war cannot be just if the cost of waging it is far worse than the aggression it is intended to redress. So, as one of Jesus' parables tells us, a nation must count the cost of going to war. Sixth, there must be a just intent. Traditionally, the right intent that should motivate an otherwise just war is to secure a just and lasting peace.

Revenge, conquest, economic gain, religion, or ideology are not good intentions for going to war even if you have an otherwise just cause. In other words, suppose a nation is wrongly attacked by another country. By the first

criterion, they have a just cause to go to war. But, suppose the citizens and leaders of this nation say to themselves, “ Hey, this nation has attacked us. We have the right to defend ourselves.

But, hey, this also affords us an opportunity to conquer them and take all their stuff! This would not be a just intent, and I dare say that just this sort of thing has happened in history. We know, for example, that the American Indian Wars were replete with this kind of injustice—when an Indian tribe would attack a white village, the Army would often respond by seizing large portions of Indian lands, not in the interests of justice, but in the economic interests of settlers, the railroad, and other big business. Seventh, the war must be fought by just means. The first six criteria must be met in order to justify going to war in the first place.

But, having the moral right to go to war is still not enough to justify participation. A just war will be conducted in a just way. A war that is otherwise just (i. e.

, meets criteria 1-6), will become unjust if the means used for conducting it are unjust. Just War Theorists have articulated criteria for the just conduct of war: 1. The war must have a limited, just objective. Restoring peace and justice are just objectives, but obliterating the other country or the capacity for its citizens to survive are not. 2.

Prisoners of war must be treated humanely and not killed or tortured. Killing or mistreating enemy soldiers who have laid down their arms in surrender is evil, not good. Of course, I realize that in war, especially in the heat and passion of battle, these kinds of things happen and may, in some

circumstances, be understandable. But that does not make them right. 3.

There must be no direct, intentional attack on civilians.

This does not mean that a war is unjust if civilians happen to be killed unintentionally. It is almost always impossible to guarantee that only soldiers will be killed. So-called “collateral damage” is inevitable in war. But, intentionally targeting civilians is immoral. Here is another point where we have to be willing to take responsibility for our own actions in history. For example, on this criterion, the fire bombings of Dresden and Tokyo in WWII are clearly seen to be unjust because civilians were intentionally targeted.

4. There must be no “overkill” in the use of weapons. That is, one should not use a bomb to achieve the military objective when a bullet will do. Of course, determining the appropriate degree of force in a particular battle may not always be easy.

One has to weigh several factors, including the risk to one’s own military forces. Nevertheless, it is wrong to intentionally and knowingly use overkill in the conduct of a war. These are the primary criteria for a just war. Before I move on, however, let me mention another—though secondary—criterion that is often overlooked in discussions of this topic. If a war fails to meet one or more of these criteria, then it is an unjust war. That means that it would be immoral for anyone to participate in that war.

And those who see it as unjust have the duty to conscientiously object to participating in it. This much is clear. However, conscientious objection requires clear and unmistakable evidence of injustice. Just having doubts about whether a war is unjust or not is not sufficient for conscientious

objection. Questions will inevitably be raised about the justice of any war, and sometimes those questions will be serious—serious enough to cause us to doubt if the war being waged (or about to be waged) is truly just. But, the just war tradition requires that the benefit of the doubt always belong to the state.

That is, if you are not sure whether or not a war is just—there is evidence going both ways, let's say—, but your government believes or claims that it is just, then you should assume that it is just until you know better. The rationale behind this criterion is that the government authorities, who are waging the war, are usually in a better position to know the facts about the war (or at least more of the facts) than individual citizens whose perspective is more limited. The War in Iraq in Light of These Criteria How does the war in Iraq measure up in light of these criteria? I believe that it measures up fairly well. First of all, it seems to me that there was and is a just cause. According to traditional theory, self-defense is a just cause for one nation (or group of nations) to wage war on others. President Bush and his cabinet made a convincing case that Saddam Hussein's regime posed a clear and imminent danger to the security of the United States.

Saddam appeared to be, from the intelligence we had available, building weapons of mass destruction that we knew he had the will to use on the American people. Of course, we all know now that there were no weapons of mass destruction—or at least none have been found yet. But, this doesn't change the fact that our government had very good reason to think that he had WMDs—the vast majority not only of the executive branch, but both houses of congress, were convinced that he had these weapons. And waiting

for Saddam to use those weapons before acting in our defense was not a rational option.

And let me also say that now that we have discovered that he probably did not have WMDs, we have no need to apologize for our actions. Saddam himself could have made it perfectly clear that he had no WMDs by allowing the U. N. weapons inspectors to do their jobs.

Instead, he hindered them at every turn, leaving the inspectors and the whole world convinced that he did have such weapons. Saddam Hussein wanted the world to believe that he had WMDs. Moreover, if you agree with me that self-defense is not the only just cause for going to war—if you agree, that is, that a moral crusade may also justify war, then we had plenty of just cause even if we knew ahead of time that Iraq had no WMDs.

Saddam's government was a tyrannical, oppressive dictatorship. He massacred thousands of his own people at whim; he dropped nerve gas on entire villages, wiping them out. He exploited his own people for his own personal profit.

If NATO was justified in invading Bosnia to end the genocide there, then we were justified in invading Iraq to end the reign of terror by Saddam Hussein. Second, the U. S. Congress approved President Bush's call for military action against Iraq.

So, there can be no question that the war in Iraq meets the second criterion: it was sanctioned and waged by a legitimate government authority. Third, what about the question of last resort? Though many people in our own country and around the world think that diplomacy was not given enough

time, it seems to me (and many others) that diplomacy was wholly ineffective in resolving the problem of Iraq's potential WMDs. Allowing diplomatic efforts to continue worked only in Saddam's favor, and every day that war was postponed only increased the threat that we believed Saddam to pose at that time. Fourth, as to whether there is a reasonable hope of success depends upon exactly what the goal is that our government was trying to achieve. Initially, the goal was to remove the threat posed by Saddam and his WMDs. We had every reason to believe that we could succeed in accomplishing this goal, and the history of what actually happened bears this out.

Our military forces launched a blitzkrieg attack that toppled Saddam's regime and neutralized his military forces in less than three weeks. No one was in any doubt as to the outcome of this initial stage of the war before it took place. Questions do arise, however, about the on-going war effort in Iraq. The stated goal of that effort, if I understand it correctly, is to help maintain order and security until the new Iraqi government can take care of itself.

I will admit that right here opinions will differ widely and strongly. We get lots of reports out of Iraq everyday about on-going violence and chaos. Some wonder if we have enough troops there to do the job and others wonder if any number of troops would be sufficient to do the job. But, the truth is that most of Iraq is secure and stable. The violence we see in the news is confined to a few specific regions, and there is no reason to believe that the insurgency there will gain enough strength to prevent us from achieving our

goals there. Though we might wish for greater certainty, there is at least a reasonable hope for success.

And let's not forget that the benefit of the doubt belongs to the state. Fifth, the cost/goal ratio of waging a successful war in Iraq easily fall within the bounds of acceptable limits, at least when looked at historically. This war will cost a lot of money when it is all said and done, but it will not break the U. S. economy.

And the lives lost (over 2000 now), while tragic and regretful, are not disproportionate to the goals we are trying to achieve. By way of comparison, let's consider what it cost us in lives to win WWII. Most Americans are oblivious to the fact that over 291, 000 American servicemen lost their lives in WWII. That's almost a third of a million! More American soldiers died on one day—D-day—in WWII than have been lost in the entire Iraq war so far.

Yet, few people would argue that the cost to defeat the Axis powers was disproportionate to the goal. Since Vietnam, Americans have become very squeamish about fighting wars, and though we are certainly right to shrink back at the thought of American soldiers dying in battle, we cannot allow our squeamishness to prevent us from making a rational assessment. The Iraq War meets the criterion concerning a rational proportion between goal and price. Sixth, whatever may be the justness of our cause, I do not think that anyone can reasonably impugn the intent. I don't think very many who are fighting this war are doing so for revenge or for money or (as we hear from some quarters) for oil.

Though some Americans may want such things, the best of us, and the best of our leaders, desire to correct the injustices done to our nation and defend ourselves from further aggression. These intentions are good and right.

Lastly, what about the means used to conduct the war? On the issue of the targeting of civilians, I believe that our military deserves an A+. They have gone out of their way, more so than any previous war in human history to minimize civilian casualties. Though many civilians have been killed and injured, no case can be made that any of these casualties were intentional.

On the treatment of POWs, however, we may raise some legitimate concerns. We all know, for example, about the mistreatment of prisoners at Abu Grab. Nevertheless, there is no indication that this mistreatment was a matter of national policy, and those who perpetrated these injustices have been punished severely. Concerning our intent for the on-going military presence in Iraq, no one but Muslim extremists believe that our objectives are anything but honorable and limited. Once having secured Iraq from the threat of the insurgency and having trained the Iraqis to maintain their own internal security, our intent is to remove our military forces from Iraq and allow the Iraqis to govern themselves.

Furthermore, no significant overkill with the use of weapons is demonstrable. In conclusion, then, I would contend that the war in Iraq is a just war, and that Christians should support it and, if called upon, participate in it. War is a terrible thing. But there are times when, in the cause of justice, the burden of that terrible thing must be borne.