

War and peace



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In July 1945, America dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan. For the first time the world realised the true devastation of nuclear warfare and its very real threat to mankind and to peace. This threat is the underlying proponent of the policy of deterrence - the policy that most nuclear powers/countries now hold in regard to their nuclear weapons i. e. a country will not attack another with nuclear weapons for the threat of nuclear retribution in return.

The countries with nuclear armaments justify their preparation on the grounds that their very existence would protect an attack on themselves. Moreover, if this threat of retaliation is ever resorted to then the policy of deterrence has failed. Lackey also compares the use of nuclear warfare to a hostage situation. With the current policies, the leaders of each side hold the population of the other as hostage, threatening to execute the hostages if the opposition to not meet certain expectations.

Indeed, Lackey holds that the policy of deterrence is much like 'tying a child to a bumper to prevent accidents' and in many ways this analogy is true. Essentially, deterrence is the threat of acting immorally (killing thousands of innocent people) to prevent an immoral act from occurring (it is this which Lackey considers immoral). Conversely, one may argue that the policy of deterrence, though immoral, in itself is a certain way to make sure peace remains - the threat of nuclear devastation eventually forces leaders to compromise and prevents the loss of millions of lives.

However, in considering the policy of deterrence deontologically, Lackey reaches the conclusion that the use of an immoral threat as a prevention of

an immoral act is intrinsically wrong in itself, as well as being seemingly pointless. Nuclear superpowers cannot endanger and violate the rights of a population to ensure a victory in much the same way we cannot tie a child to a bumper to prevent an accident. In a speech made in the House of Commons on 10 November, 1932, Stanley Baldwin said: 'The only defence is offence which means that you have to kill more women and children more quickly than the enemy can if you want to save yourselves.'

In an age of nuclear weapons, does such a strategy make sense? The traits of nuclear warfare are; the indiscriminate killing of civilians, the mass destruction of buildings and the general disabling of the enemy - and for Stanley Baldwin these defensive-offence traits would have been ideal. We do need to protect ourselves from the enemy and this, in the opinion of Stanley Baldwin, is the only way to ensure survival. However, it is important to recognise that this statement was made in 1932 before the advent of the nuclear age.

Moreover, with the phenomenally devastating power of nuclear warfare the morality and practicality of this strategy must be called into question.

Nuclear War is truly devastating and ruthlessly indiscriminate - if we entered into a war where both or all sides openly use nuclear warheads the loss of life would be phenomenal and whole countries would be destroyed. Nuclear warfare would go beyond the means of achieving the victory Stanley Baldwin saw in his day. It would be total obliteration. The policy of obliterating cities was adopted by the Allies in the last war and was born largely out of the hunger for retribution.

This in itself is intrinsically and morally wrong and is the ugly side of war. Nuclear warfare and its subsequent mass destruction, fuelled by something so trivial as revenge, would be pointless and morally wrong. Conversely, one may argue that we must use any means to fight aggression, especially against those with little or no ability to compromise but with the advent of the nuclear age this is a dangerous argument to uphold. Now with the knowledge of nuclear warfare it is important that we recognise its destructive possibilities and, ultimately, that we learn to protect ourselves from ourselves.