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Politicians like to talk about morality, but the complaint of the realist is that such talk is just moonshine. John Mearsheimer famously remarked that 'the pronouncements of the policy elites are heavily flavoured with optimism and moralism. Behind closed doors, however, the elites who make national policy speak mostly the language of power.'[1] So is it moonshine, or do moral considerations at least sometimes shape security policy?

Some light can be shed on this question by considering the case of Britain, and three major areas of debate over British security policy since the end of the Second World War: the debate over area bombing that began in the closing stages of the war and has continued up to the present day, with the memorial for Bomber Command finally opened in June 2012; the moral panic over nuclear weapons persisting from the early 1950s to the present day but at its most intense during the Cold War period; and the post-Cold War debate over the utility of military force and, in particular, the morality of humanitarian intervention (from 1989 onwards). These areas of debate are closely interlinked by a profound ethical concern for the protection of innocent civilians from attack, as required by the Just War principle of non-combatant immunity.

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The legacy of area bombing

Just War discourse is currently in fashion. Its concepts have become part of our vocabulary in discussing conflict, with even politicians employing the language of Just War at times. So it may come as a surprise that the Just War tradition, having flourished in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, thereafter gradually fell into disuse. For most of the twentieth century, the tradition was largely ignored, kept barely alive in one or two Jesuit seminaries. Just War teaching was accordingly not publicly available as a tool of moral discourse about war during either of the two global wars of the century.

As a result, there was surprisingly little public debate about the morality of city bombing by the Allies during the Second World War, even though about half a million German civilians were killed in such bombing. The primary objective of these area-bombing attacks, as set out in Air Ministry Directive 22, issued on 14 February 1942, was to weaken 'the morale of the enemy civilian population and, in particular, of its industrial workers'.[2] City bombing was accepted for most of the war as a legitimate means to wage war against the extreme threat posed by Axis dictators. There was some dissent. In the United Kingdom, the morality of area bombing was robustly criticised by George Bell, the Bishop of Chichester. Concern was also expressed within the Royal Air Force Bomber Command by John Collins, its chaplain, who went on to become a leading figure in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). In the United States, a 1944 article entitled 'The Morality of Obliteration Bombing' by John Ford, a Jesuit priest, criticised the attacks using Just War principles.[3] Such voices of dissent were rare, however, and Ford's article, while retrospectively regarded as of seminal importance, was published in the relatively obscure Jesuit journal *Theological Studies*. For most of the war, few people questioned the morality or strategic efficacy of area bombing.

As the war drew to a close, there was, however, growing unease over what had been done, with even Winston Churchill, the instigator of the policy, confiding in a minute to Charles Portal, Chief of the Air Staff, that 'the destruction of Dresden remains a serious query against the conduct of Allied bombing.'[4] The firebombing of Dresden on 13–15 February 1945 in a

joint operation by British and American air forces killed between 18,000 and 25,000 German civilians, substantially more than the 550 estimated to have been killed by the Luftwaffe bombing of Coventry on 14 November 1940.[5] Critics of the attacks were particularly concerned that they had occurred so late in the war, with victory nearly assured. They were, however, in line with previous city bombing raids carried out by British and American air forces from 1942 to the end of the war. Approximately 45,000 people were killed in firebombing attacks on Hamburg between 24 July and 3 August 1943.[6]

Moral guilt over area bombing persisted long after the war, particularly in the United Kingdom. It led to what Michael Walzer, the American political philosopher, called 'the dishonouring' of Arthur Harris, British Air Chief Marshal and the lead strategist of the attacks.[7] Unlike his fellow commanders, Harris was not rewarded with a peerage after the war. It was not until June 2012 that a memorial was erected in Green Park, London, to the 55,573 members of Bomber Command who had been killed in action during the war, nearly half of the 125,000 who served in Bomber Command.

Harris was not rewarded with a peerage

Area bombing was in breach of the Just War prohibition of deliberate attacks on non-combatants, and was therefore morally questionable. There were also considerable grounds for doubting its strategic efficacy. Harris remained convinced to the end, despite mounting contradictory evidence, that his bombers alone would be able to produce 'a state of devastation in which surrender is inevitable'.[8] But the underlying logic of how this would be achieved was never clear. Arguably, just as the Blitz strengthened the resolve of many Londoners, the bombing of German cities hardened the German people's will to resist, so failing to cause the expected collapse in either morale or industrial production. Moreover, even if the bombing had broken civilian morale, it was never clear how this would induce the political changes required to end the fighting in a totalitarian society from which all political opposition had been banned.

Accordingly, there were good grounds for the moral guilt felt in Britain after the war, and the political and military leaders who devised the policy,

alongside their scientific advisers, are justifiably criticised. But what of the aircrews who flew the bombing missions, and those who provided essential technical and auxiliary support? The casualty levels in Bomber Command were greater than in any other service, so the bravery of its members was of the highest order. But do they also share moral responsibility for the iniquities of the policy they implemented each night, at great risk to themselves? Arguably, if members of Bomber Command had disobeyed orders and declined to carry out the missions, they would have made it difficult to implement the policy, and have achieved a moral gain. However, it is unfair to place such a burden of moral responsibility on these airmen.

We hold people morally responsible for actions over which they have some influence or control, and to which they have in some sense consented.

The aircrews bear far less blame

Control and consent are the key preconditions in the attribution of moral responsibility. The political and military leaders who devised and monitored the policy of area bombing had such control, and gave their consent to the attacks. They can, therefore, be held morally responsible for the injustice of the policy. But the aircrews who carried out their orders bear far less blame. They had no influence or control over the policy, so cannot be held morally responsible for its injustice. The justified moral condemnation of Harris does not extend to the ordinary members of Bomber Command, and the Green Park memorial is therefore an overdue recognition of their bravery.

The moral qualms over area bombing led to important changes in international law. Draft rules on air warfare were drawn up in The Hague in 1922–23 but were not ratified, and it was not until 1977 that the principle of non-combatant immunity was included in the Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions. The statute details that attacks may only be directed against military targets and 'the civilian population as such, as well as individual civilians, shall not be the object of attack. Acts or threats of violence, the primary purpose of which is to spread terror among the civilian population, are prohibited.'[9] The wording of the protocol is more ambiguous than one might wish. However, the statute makes it difficult to deny that a policy of city bombing similar to that carried out by the Allies is not only immoral

and in breach of Just War constraints, but also illegal under international law. This is a kind of moral progress.

The moral panic over nuclear weapons

The nuclear detonations over Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 6 and 9 August 1945 are estimated to have instantly killed 110,000 people.[10] Although the US firebombing of Tokyo on 9 March 1945 caused a similar number of casualties, the atomic raids required the detonation of only two devices, and subsequently led to perhaps 100,000 deaths from radiation sickness and other injuries.[11]

The scale of casualties to which people were accustomed in the Second World War meant that the strategic and moral significance of the new weapons did not immediately become apparent. But moral concern grew rapidly after the Soviet Union acquired nuclear weapons in 1949, as the rivalries and tension of the Cold War intensified. In 1954 John Foster Dulles, then US Secretary of State, announced a new nuclear doctrine of 'massive retaliation', threatening that any attack on the West would provoke a major nuclear response. Many found this doctrine both morally unacceptable and strategically implausible.

The doctrine provoked a particularly lively debate in the United Kingdom, which had acquired its own nuclear weapons in 1952. For some, the answer lay in the abolition of nuclear weapons, and the CND was founded in February 1958. The first Aldermaston March was held at Easter of that year.[12]

Others, while sharing the moral concern over nuclear weapons, felt that calls for their abolition were too simplistic. A leading opponent of the drift towards sole reliance on nuclear weapons and massive retaliation was Rear-Admiral Anthony Buzzard, the Royal Navy's Director of Intelligence from 1951–54. Buzzard recognised that the new weapons could not be simply un-invented. But, as a devout Anglican layman, he objected to massive retaliation on both moral and strategic grounds. He believed that deterrence through massive retaliation violated moral principles because it threatened an excessive reaction to any aggression and entailed attacks on civilian targets. Employing a term introduced by Basil Liddell Hart, a military his-

torian, he instead advocated 'graduated deterrence'. Buzzard argued that it was better to deter enemy aggression with the threat of tactical strikes than with the threats to population centres.[13]

Buzzard discussed his ideas with Bell, the bishop of his diocese, whose moral concern about nuclear weapons was based on the same misgivings as his opposition to area bombing: the threat they posed to innocent civilians. Bell introduced Buzzard to Kenneth Grubb, chairman of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, and through him to Alan Booth, secretary of the organisation. They helped organise a conference attended by around 70 religious, political, military and media leaders in Brighton in January 1957 to discuss the moral and political–military aspects of defence and disarmament, with particular emphasis on the scope for limiting war in the nuclear age. This led to the foundation of the Institute for Strategic Studies – later the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) – in the United Kingdom on 20 November 1958, which aimed to provide a more permanent forum for the discussion of these issues, with Grubb as the first chairman of the council.[14]

It had originally been envisaged that the IISS would address both the ethical and political–military questions posed by the new strategic situation. But, as Michael Howard, who was one of the participants in the Brighton conference, and is a founding member and President Emeritus of the IISS, relates in his memoirs:

> We quickly found that we could not sustain our obligation to study both the political and moral dimensions of our subject, as had been the original intention. Few of us shared the belief of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament that the moral dilemma created by the invention of nuclear weapons could be solved by simply abolishing them, but none of us could ignore the profound moral problems created by their possession, let alone their use. So a less well-known body came into being … entitled CCADD (Council on Christian Approaches to Defence and Disarmament).[15]

Howard has been a vice-president of CCADD since taking over the post from Alastair Buchan, who died in 1976. Buchan had served as both the first

vice-president of CCADD and the first director of the IISS, underlining the close links between the two bodies.

Further light is thrown on the creation of CCADD by Robert A. Gessert, a prominent early US member:

> By 1963, the small informal group (in the IISS), which had remained almost solely British, decided it needed broader participation, especially from the countries of the Western Alliance. Hence a conference – not unlike the Brighton Conference of 1957 – was called at Lambeth Palace in November 1963 to discuss 'Christian approaches to defense and disarmament.' This conference was attended by a smattering of Americans, including such figures as Professor Paul Ramsey, and a small but strong German delegation headed by Bishop Hermann Kunst, then Lutheran Chaplain-General to the West German Armed Forces and Envoy of the German Evangelical Church to the Federal Government at Bonn. The 1963 conference marked the creation of what was to become the international Council on Christian Approaches to Defence and Disarmament.[16]

CCADD has continued its activities both nationally and internationally, broadening its ethical concerns from an initial focus on nuclear weapons to address the whole range of security challenges faced in the twenty-first century. The organisation's distinctive feature has always been to embrace and promote discussion of the ethics of security from a multiplicity of viewpoints, ranging from the pacifism of Sidney Bailey, one of its earliest presidents and a distinguished Quaker peace worker, to the advocacy of nuclear deterrence of Michael Quinlan, a pre-eminent nuclear theologian and Permanent Secretary of the UK Ministry of Defence, who was also one of its members.

So did the moral angst over nuclear weapons – which, arising in the 1950s, gave birth to both the IISS and CCADD – make any difference to security policy? For those who oppose nuclear deterrence on moral grounds, the answer is no because the debate has not led to the abolition of nuclear weapons. But moral difficulties do not just beset those advocating deterrence. Those who support the decommissioning of nuclear weapons in

advance of secure multilateral disarmament agreements face equally acute moral difficulties. Potentially ceding a monopoly on the immense destructive power of nuclear weapons to evil tyrants is hardly a morally desirable outcome and one that could increase the likelihood of nuclear use. To escape this dilemma, there has from the earliest days been a search for a middle way: a form of nuclear deterrence that would prevent war without depending on an immoral threat to kill large numbers of civilians.

Such moral concerns contributed to the abandonment of massive retaliation and NATO's adoption of a strategy of flexible response in 1967. This strategy was based on a range of defensive options that enabled the alliance to respond to any attack at an appropriate level, a policy that echoed the graduated response called for by Buzzard and Hart.

Ethical concerns have driven arms control

Importantly, the moral concern over nuclear weapons also led to the rediscovery of the Just War theory to provide a framework for assessing the ethics of deterrence. Ramsey, a US theologian, played a key role in reworking Just War theory to resolve some of the moral dilemmas posed by nuclear weapons and, in particular, critique a policy that relied on immoral threats of the mass killing of civilians in breach of both the Just War principles of proportion and non-combatant immunity. He set out his thinking in *War and the Christian Conscience: How Shall Modern War be Conducted Justly?* (1961) and *The Just War: Force and Political Responsibility* (1968).[17] Just War theory, having been revived in the nuclear context, was applied to conventional conflicts by figures such as Walzer to critique the Vietnam war.[18] In the United Kingdom, CCADD members have always been deeply involved in both sides of the debate on the ethics of nuclear weapons, including through the publication of books, both collectively and individually.[19] Quinlan helped shape British and NATO nuclear policy with an acute awareness of the moral difficulties of deterrence.[20]

Have these ethical concerns changed security policy in a morally significant way? Such concerns have driven arms control measures that reduced excessive nuclear stockpiles, although nuclear zero remains a passionately

desired but still distant prospect. Flexible response was a great improvement on massive retaliation because it sought to postpone any significant use of nuclear weapons in an initial reaction to aggression. But it still appeared ultimately to rely on an immoral threat to destroy cities. Is such a threat an inescapable feature of successful deterrence?

The power of nuclear weapons is such that any use of them, however restrained, would have a devastating effect. This is why the threat of nuclear attack is such a powerful deterrent. But such threats also present a moral challenge. Some critics of deterrence have argued that an immoral intention to kill non-combatants inherently underpins such threats, which no amount of what philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe calls 'double think about double effect' – portraying civilian deaths as unintended side effects – can gainsay.[21] This view is supported by strategists who argue that deterrence will not be effective unless it includes a counter-population threat. This presents a catch-22: deterrence is either immoral or it does not work. But this is an unreal choice.

It is possible to conceive of an effective deterrent posture that does not rely on an immoral counter-population targeting policy, but rather is based on counter-combatant targeting that threatens military and related assets.[22] Such a policy could ease, if not remove, the moral difficulties of deterrence. It could also enhance the efficacy of the deterrent threat because dictators whom we are most likely to seek to deter in the post-Cold-War period typically show scant regard for their subjects. They are much more likely to be impressed by a threat to the military and related assets, including military-industrial infrastructure, on which their power depends.

Have ethical concerns led governments to change their targeting policies? This is difficult to assess, given the secrecy that usually attends nuclear policy and, in particular, targeting plans. But there are some indications that such considerations have had at least some influence on Western nuclear powers. Quinlan argued that ethical concerns have had some impact on US and UK targeting policy.[23] Notably, the need to avoid a counter-population threat was underlined by former French President Jacques Chirac in his explanation of the change in France's targeting policy following the end of the Cold War:

> Deterrence must also enable us to deal with the threats to our vital interests that regional powers armed with weapons of mass destruction could pose … In this case the choice would not be between the total annihilation of a country and doing nothing. The damage to which a possible aggressor would be exposed would be directed above all against his political, economic, and military power centres.[24]

In explaining this shift, Henri Bentégeat, Chirac's adviser, noted that:

> Deterrence has been adapted to remain credible within the enduring framework of a non-use policy … We don't intend to develop battlefield weapons as the *force de frappe* is a political deterrent; instead we rely on a diversified payload that can spare an adversary's population and cities.[25]

Ethical concerns have perhaps had some influence on nuclear policy. Just War theory has also helped set the parameters for public debate on nuclear deterrence and, indeed, war more generally. But for many, morality has shaped nuclear policy far less than they desire, with progress on arms control towards nuclear zero still painfully slow. This lack of progress may reflect, however, not just moral obduracy on the part of policymakers but also the grim reality that the advent of nuclear weapons has left no easy moral choices. This point was underlined by Bailey, a pacifist, who noted that 'there was no policy about nuclear weapons that did not pose appalling moral and practical dilemmas'.[26] What the ethical concerns over nuclear weapons have certainly done is strongly reinforce a taboo on nuclear use, so that Hiroshima and Nagasaki remain the only occasions on which the weapons have been used. This taboo on use is a major moral gain that we must ensure is strengthened and maintained forever.

Humanitarian intervention

With the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 and the end of the Cold War, concern over nuclear weapons reduced. But as the fear of nuclear escalation receded, the perceived utility of conventional force increased. The outbreak of hostilities in the Balkans, in 1992, included ethnic cleansing

and mass killing in Bosnia-Herzegovina, at the heart of Europe. News channels carried instant detailed reports of atrocities around the world. In the early 1990s, Western governments were deeply reluctant to intervene to prevent mass slaughter, even when it occurred so close to home. Initial interventions in Bosnia-Herzegovina were therefore limited in scale and value. What largely altered government behaviour over the course of the decade was moral outrage at what was taking place and the resulting public outcry for action.[27]

The moral clamour for intervention grew with increasing intensity throughout the 1990s. Fewer people accepted that state boundaries were impenetrable barriers behind which torture and genocide could be freely carried out. The driving moral concern, the protection of innocent civilians from assault, was the same as that which spurred earlier debates over area bombing and nuclear deterrence. By the end of the decade, even certain hard-nosed international relations theorists were beginning to question some of the presumptions of political realism and to recognise that the concept of the state detailed in the Peace of Westphalia was neither an inevitable product of the human condition nor a boundary of moral endeavour. Changes in public opinion began, albeit gradually and haltingly, to be reflected in the practices of governments.

The clamour for intervention grew

In 1994 the international community failed to prevent the genocide in Rwanda in which around 800,000 Tutsis were murdered at the behest of the country's Hutu-dominated government.[28] In 1995 UN peacekeepers failed to prevent the massacre of over 8,000 Bosnians at Srebrenica. But in 1999 NATO launched military operations to prevent the Serbian government from massacring Kosovar Albanians, in what was openly justified as a humanitarian operation. World leaders meeting in New York on the tenth anniversary of the Rwanda massacre vowed never to allow such an incident to occur again. Summing up the prevailing international mood, then UK Prime Minister Tony Blair declared that 'if Rwanda happened again today as it did in 1993 [*sic*], when a million people were slaughtered in cold blood, we would have a moral duty to act there also.'[29]

The moral clamour changed not only political rhetoric and agenda but also international legal thinking, as shown by two important reports by international commissions. The 2001 International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, which was sponsored by the Canadian government, called on the international community to recognise its 'international responsibility to protect'.[30] This new concept reflected the idea that 'sovereign states have a responsibility to protect their own citizens from avoidable catastrophe – from mass murder and rape, from starvation – but that when they are unwilling or unable to do so that responsibility must be borne by the broader community of states.'[31] Sovereignty entails not just rights but responsibilities, and a state that fails to protect its people may forfeit its right to self-determination.

These conclusions were echoed in a report by the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel in December 2004. The responsibility of a state to protect its people and, if it fails to do so, for the international community to act, was subsequently endorsed, albeit in more convoluted and qualified language, at the UN summit on 14–16 September 2005:

> We are prepared to take collective action, in a timely and decisive manner, through the Security Council, in accordance with the Charter, including Chapter VII, on a case-by-case basis and in cooperation with relevant regional organisations as appropriate, should peaceful means be inadequate and national authorities manifestly fail to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.[32]

Blair responded to the statement by noting that 'for the first time at this summit, we are agreed that states do not have the right to do what they will within their own borders.'[33]

This recognition of an international responsibility to protect was an important victory for morality. But the victory appeared short-lived. Following the summit, the international appetite for intervention appears to have waned as rapidly as it waxed in the late 1990s, as shown by Western eagerness to leave the conflict in Afghanistan. The declining appetite for

intervention largely results from the shadow still cast by the unpopular, and widely perceived as unjust, invasion of Iraq in 2003, as well as exhaustion from protracted counter-insurgency operations in Afghanistan. Were realists therefore right to warn against the intrusion of morality into international affairs? Had the legitimisation of humanitarian intervention by the UN summit been a dreadful mistake?

This would be a perverse conclusion. The invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan were not undertaken for humanitarian reasons. There is no justification for using the war in Iraq as a basis for arguing against humanitarian intervention where gross abuses of human rights are taking place. It is illogical to suggest that because an invasion that was not undertaken for humanitarian reasons was unjust, all humanitarian interventions are unjust. More importantly, the UN's reasons for modifying the doctrine on the inviolability of state boundaries remains valid: borders should not be impenetrable barriers behind which an atrocity may take place.

Borders should not be barriers

It is also important to recall that the first military venture explicitly undertaken to fulfil the Responsibility to Protect was the NATO air operations in Libya from 17 March–31 October 2011. Unlike the conflict in Iraq, the Libyan intervention sought to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe and was explicitly authorised by the UN Security Council under Resolution 1973 (2011).[34] The NATO operation was successful as it prevented civilian massacres in Benghazi and elsewhere. Humanitarian intervention can still work.

Nonetheless, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have demonstrated the difficulties of employing force. But this painfully learnt lesson, far from justifying the exclusion of morality from international affairs, underlines the need for the use of force to be carefully constrained by the application of Just War principles. These standards provide essential ethical guidance for governments and the international community to determine when interventions may be legitimately undertaken, and underline the need for rigorous analysis before any such action. They impose crucial constraints on the behaviour of states, including their ability to take pre-emptive action, and may provide reassurance to those

who fear that claims of humanitarianism are being used to justify abuses of government power.

These criteria also provide guidance on when interventions should take place. Where the principles of Just War are met and the potential humanitarian cost of inaction is great, we may have not merely a right but a duty to intervene, as determined by the doctrine of Responsibility to Protect. Just War criteria provide a basis for criticising state interventions that fail to meet them, such as in Iraq, and for criticising the United Nations for its failure to intervene, such as in Rwanda.

The international realm is not a morality-free zone. The UN summit's recognition of the Responsibility to Protect and the legitimacy of humanitarian intervention was an important victory for morality. It was a belated rediscovery of the altruism and universality of the Just War principles expounded by Roman Catholic philosopher Francisco de Vitoria, for whom the 'lawful defence of the innocent from unjust death' constituted just cause for war.[35] The concessions to morality made in 2005 must not be lost. It is our responsibility to prevent genocide, and ensure that the world does not stand idly by while hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians are slaughtered, as it did in 1994.

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The language of morality is much used in contemporary discussions of security issues. The nagging doubt with which this essay started nonetheless persists: politicians may hijack the language of morality, while ceding very little, if anything, to its substance. The triumph of Just War theory may therefore be illusory.[36] Such concerns are well-founded, and we must keep a watchful eye on our political and military leaders, with a particular responsibility for this oversight resting with the media, academe and religious organisations.

Use of moral discourse is, however, a two-edged sword. Moral language may be exploited by politicians to garner support for their causes but once they seek to justify their actions in such terms, they expose their words and actions to critical scrutiny and criticism from within a moral framework.

This was the experience of Blair and former US President George W. Bush when they attempted to establish just cause for the invasion of Iraq, and of Israeli leaders when they claimed to have made every effort to minimise non-combatant casualties in the invasion of Gaza in December 2008–January 2009. Both claims were hotly disputed.[37]

The possibly surprising conclusion is that, in each of the areas considered, moral concerns have played at least some part in shaping policy and public discourse. Since the end of the Second World War, there has also been a growing appreciation of the importance of moral constraints in international affairs. This was prompted by the rediscovery of Just War theory, initially in the context of the debate over nuclear weapons, and subsequently in a wide range of areas. The Council on Christian Approaches to Defence and Disarmament, which celebrates its 50th anniversary this year, has made a significant contribution to this growing awareness. The rediscovery of Just War theory has also provided a powerful analytical tool with which to focus and sharpen moral debates in the future.

Acknowledgements

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