

From a Just War to a Just Peace Paradigm
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As we consider what to do next in Iraq, what to do next in the War on Terror, it is time to move from just war to just peace theory.

Just war theory is thousands of years old; it is a framework for thinking about when it is right to fight war and for thinking about the right way to fight wars once they begin. However, just war is only war. It presupposes war. It is a theory that has outlived its usefulness. Just war theorists argue that it is the best framework for preventing war because of the criterion that just wars are only fought as a last resort, and there is always something else to do before a war begins.

For example, the current conflict in Iraq cannot be considered a just war because the United States went to war without allowing the United Nations inspectors to complete their work, thus the war was not the last resort. Just war theorist Michael Walzer argues further that the idea of preventive war does not meet just war criteria because the dangers are “distant” and “speculative, whereas the costs of a preventive war are near, certain, and usually terrible” (*Arguing About War* 147).

However, I say that there is no such thing as a just war. Therefore, we need to shift our theoretical framework from just war to just peace theory. Just war theory requires an announcement by a legitimate authority, a just intent, a good probability of success, proportionality, and war should be the last resort. In a world where war has unexpected ripple effects for other countries, in a world where there are functioning international organizations, I

say the president of one nation or even one nation's elected officials does not constitute a legitimate authority. When we think about just intent, we have to face the reality that the reasons for war are always mixed. While wars may be explained through a rhetoric of fighting for God-given freedom, the protection and liberation of innocents, or national security, at the end of the day, war profiteers profit. Wars are usually violent contests over natural resources that will affect a nation's or the world economy. Assessing the probability of success is problematic because we live in a world awash in small arms. The X factor is the extent to which insurgents are willing to kill and to die for their cause after legitimate authorities have declared the war over. This is especially unknown when the killing and the dying are linked to religious convictions.

Further, war is only a last resort when imagination, communication, diplomacy, patience and politics have failed. War theorist and historian Carl Von Clausewitz, writing in the 19th century, observed that "war is policy by other means." War ought to cause us to challenge the policies of which it becomes the operational means.

Once war begins, just war theory requires the protection of non combatants and proportionality. However, bombs and bullets do not pause in midair to distinguish between soldiers and innocent women and children, noncombatant old women and old men; they do not spare an innocent ecology. The aim of war is the defeat of the enemy, and according to Clausewitz, this means defeating the enemy's will. All too often the tactic to achieve this has been to attack the civilian population.

Enter just peace theory. Just war theory presupposes war; just peace theory presupposes peace. Professor Glen Stassen's seminal work on just peace theory, *Just Peacemaking*, proposes ten just peace strategies – grassroots groups, UN and international organizations, economic and

sustainable development, reduce offensive weapons and the weapons trade, nonviolent direct action, independent initiative, conflict resolution, acknowledge responsibility, repent, forgive. I say: let us consider three broad categories of a just peace – truth, respect and security.

In war, the truth dies first. It is important to know the truth as best as we can know it and to tell it through accurate journalism, comprehensive scholarship, science and art. Truth requires us to acknowledge responsibility, to repent and to forgive if necessary, to establish truth and reconciliation commissions in post war situations. Respect. Respect for human rights is important, especially respect for the rights of women in societies where women are second class citizens. Respect requires that we recognize the image of God on the face of the Other, even the enemy Other. Respect means that we work to provide basic human needs of food, water, shelter, infrastructure and employment through economic development. Security. Security is necessary for peace. However, it is necessary to think about security beyond the movement of armies. Security may be found by identifying people of influence at the grassroots of any situation. Every neighborhood has a trusted man or woman, a tribal leader, or a religious leader who can speak peace or organize local security. These people may not agree with our national agenda; they may even be people who are hostile to the United States, but they exist, and we ought to take independent steps to work with them.

Further, security is found through the cooperation of international organizations, especially the cooperation of nations in the region. Thus, a just peace paradigm would require diplomacy with a country's neighbors. In the case of Iraq there ought to be ongoing diplomatic communication with all of Iraq's neighbors, including Iran and Syria. (The Iraq Study Group has already recommended this.) And one of the primary tasks of regional diplomacy is to stop the

flow of small arms across borders into conflict situations.

Truth. Respect. Security. From the perspective of Christian ethics that seeks to think about the implications of a just peace paradigm for the War on Terror and for Christian Discipleship, we look to the radical love of Jesus as our moral guide. The hard sayings of Jesus require us to: love our enemies, to bless those who curse us, to do good to those who hate us, to pray for those who spitefully use us and who persecute us. (Matthew 5: 44) Jesus calls us to be fearless: “do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.” (Matt. 10:28)

The truth is: The War on Terror is a category error. Terror cannot fight a war. It cannot negotiate peace. Terror is a response; it is the fear of dangers real or imagined. Terrorism is a tactic, and a terrorist is a criminal who ought to be stopped through the apparatuses of the police. At the same time, we have to be careful about giving the police powers that will cripple our civil liberties. Within this context, a War on Terror has to be an effort to contain our own fears. Thus, the weapons of this warfare are not carnal, but are the weapons of faith. This is not the work of the state. This is the work of communities of faith.

For Christians, respect for the Other, the enemy Other, the terrorist Other, moves beyond respect to love. Radical Love. Thus our security is found, not in the power of the military, but in the power of a better idea, in the power of a better vision of what it means to be human. The Christian tradition teaches us to overcome evil with good. Our security is thus found within a value system that requires citizens to insist that the resources of the state go toward human flourishing and not toward the destruction of human beings and of nature. This is the deployment of positive power toward a positive peace. Our security is found in our power to relieve human suffering, not by causing it through war. If we begin with the idea that the means

to overcome evil is to do good, then the questions now become: what good can we do for the world? What good can we do for the enemy that will overcome evil and bring peace?

Works Cited

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