

War with Iraq Is it Just?

The debate about going to war with Iraq involves not only military and political choices, but also moral choices. The material that follows aims to help clarify those moral choices by reflecting on traditional Catholic teaching on peacemaking, just war, and nonviolence. Recent U.S. bishops' statements are the primary source for interpreting this teaching.

The specific decisions that individuals make on this issue are "prudential judgments." Therefore, people of good will may differ on how to apply the just war norms in particular cases. Nevertheless, there is always a serious obligation for all people of faith to justify their own conclusions as measured against the moral norms of Catholic teaching.

"War is never just another means that one can choose to employ for settling differences between nations . . . As the charter of the United Nations organization and international laws itself remind us, war cannot be decided upon, even when it is a matter of ensuring the common good, except as the very last option and in accordance with very strict conditions, without ignoring the consequences for the civilian population both during and after the military operations . . .

[War] is always a defeat for humanity."

Pope John Paul II, January 13, 2003

Just War Criteria

Recent statements by the U.S. bishops have opposed the current movement toward war against Iraq. The bishops say "We continue to find it difficult to justify the resort to war against Iraq, lacking clear and adequate evidence of an imminent attack of a grave nature." They call on President Bush to "step back from the brink of war with Iraq and work for a peace that is just and enduring."

The traditional just war criteria used by the bishops in making this assessment fall into two categories – *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bellum*.

1. *Jus ad bellum* – criteria used to decide whether to use lethal force:

- *Just Cause*: force may be used only to correct a grave, public evil, i.e., aggression or massive violation of the basic rights of whole populations;
- *Comparative Justice*: while there may be rights and wrongs on all sides of a conflict, to override the presumption against the use of force the injustice suffered by one party must significantly outweigh that suffered by the other;
- *Legitimate Authority*: only duly constituted public authorities may use deadly force or wage war;
- *Right Intention*: force may be used only in a truly just cause and solely for that purpose;
- *Probability of Success*: arms may not be used in a futile cause or in a case where disproportionate measures are required to achieve success;
- *Proportionality*: the overall destruction expected from the use of force must be outweighed by the good to be achieved;
- *Last Resort*: force may be used only after all peaceful alternatives have been seriously tried and exhausted.

2. *Jus in Bellum* – criteria governing the actual conduct of war:

- *Noncombatant Immunity*: civilians may not be the object of direct attack and military personnel must take due care to avoid and minimize indirect harm to civilians;
- *Proportionality*: in the conduct of hostilities, efforts must be made to attain military objectives with no more force than is militarily necessary and to avoid disproportionate collateral damage to civilian life and property;
- *Right Intention*: even in the midst of conflict, the aim of political and military leaders must be peace with justice, so that acts of vengeance and indiscriminate violence, whether by individuals, military units or governments, are forbidden.

Is War on Iraq a Just War?

Using the just war criteria, the U.S. bishops make the following judgments:

Just Cause: The bishops express deep concern about recent proposals to expand traditional limits on just cause to include preventive uses of military force to overthrow threatening regimes or to deal with weapons of mass destruction. They argue that, in accord with international law, a distinction should be made between efforts to change unacceptable behavior of a government and efforts to end that government's existence.

Legitimate Authority: Decisions concerning possible war in Iraq require compliance with U.S. constitutional imperatives, broad consensus within our nation, and some form of international sanction. Therefore, action by Congress and the UN Security Council are important. The bishops cite the Holy See in saying that, if recourse to force is deemed necessary, it should take place within the framework of the United Nations after considering the consequences for Iraqi civilians, and regional and global stability.

Probability of Success and Proportionality: The use of force must have "serious prospects for success" and "must not produce evils and disorders graver than the evil to be eliminated" (Catechism, #2309). The bishops recognize that not taking military action could have its own negative consequences, but they express concern that war against Iraq could have unpredictable consequences not only for Iraq, but for peace and stability elsewhere in the Middle East. The use of force might provoke the very kind of attacks that it is intended to prevent, could impose terrible new burdens on an already long-suffering civilian population, and could lead to wider conflict and instability in the region. War against Iraq could also detract from the effort to help build a just and stable order in Afghanistan and could undermine broader efforts to stop terrorism.

Norms governing the conduct of war: While recognizing improved military capability and serious efforts to avoid directly targeting civilians in war, the bishops argue that the use of military force in Iraq could bring incalculable costs for a civilian population that has suffered so much from war, repression, and a debilitating embargo. In assessing whether "collateral damage" is proportionate, the lives of Iraqi men, women and children should be valued just as would be the lives of members of our own family and citizens of our own country.

The bishops' conclusion is that our nation should continue to actively pursue alternatives to war in the Middle East. The U.S. should work to maintain broad international support for constructive, effective and legitimate ways to contain and deter aggressive Iraqi actions and threats.

In addition, they support:

- enforcement of the military embargo and maintenance of political sanctions.
- more carefully-focused economic sanctions which do not threaten the lives of innocent Iraqi civilians.
- broader and stronger non-proliferation measures. Such efforts should include greater support for programs to safeguard and eliminate weapons of mass destruction in all nations, stricter controls on the export of missiles and weapons technology, improved enforcement of the biological and chemical weapons conventions, and fulfillment of U.S. commitments to pursue negotiations on nuclear disarmament under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

It is worth noting the clear differences in the bishops' position on Iraq as compared with their statements regarding the U.S. response to terrorism after the September 11, 2001, attack. Referring to the United States' "moral right" and grave obligation to defend the common good" against such attacks, the bishops expressed support for "efforts of our nation and the international community to seek out and hold accountable, in accord with national and international law, those individuals, groups and governments which are responsible."

Promoting Peace

Catholic teaching has always insisted that peace is more than the absence of war. As Pope Paul VI said in his 1972 World Day of Peace Message, "If you want peace, work for justice."

In their statements on the U.S. struggle against terrorism, the U.S. bishops have emphasized this theme. They declared, "Our nation must join with others in addressing policies and problems that provide fertile ground in which terrorism can thrive." They suggest that maintaining a strong military is only one component of our national security. A much broader, long-term understanding of security is needed. In a world where one-fifth of the population survives on less than \$1 per day, where some twenty countries are involved in major armed conflict, and where poverty, corruption, and repressive regimes bring untold suffering to millions of people, our nation simply cannot remain indifferent.

The bishops assert that creative and constructive U.S. engagement, particularly with the Arab and Muslim worlds, will help restore a peace based on justice. Given the prominence of our country, it is incumbent upon us to pursue in whatever ways we can a more just international political, social and economic order.

Among the specific ways that the bishops suggest for building a more peaceful and just world are the following:

The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Support real security for Israel and the establishment of a viable state for Palestinians.

The scandal of poverty: Intolerable extremes of misery and a growing gulf between the "haves" and the "have-nots" characterize much of today's world, and breed hostility towards economic globalization. This hostility can be addressed, in part, by a comprehensive development agenda, including substantially increased foreign aid, more equitable trade, and continuing efforts to relieve the crushing burden of debt. We who have so much have a responsibility to the world's needy. We cannot remain last among donor countries in development aid.

Human rights: The necessity of maintaining an international coalition against terrorism must not lead our government to give less public attention to religious liberty and human rights violations around the world. As a nation committed to promoting human rights, we cannot compromise these priorities for temporary alliances that would overlook them.

Promoting Peace

Catholic teaching has always insisted that peace is more than the absence of war. As Pope Paul VI said in his 1972 World Day of Peace Message, "If you want peace, work for justice."

In their statements on the U.S. struggle against terrorism, the U.S. bishops have emphasized this theme. They declared, "Our nation must join with others in addressing policies and problems that provide fertile ground in which terrorism can thrive." They suggest that maintaining a strong military is only one component of our national security. A much broader, long-term understanding of security is needed. In a world where one-fifth of the population

How You Can Take Action

- Call President Bush (202-456-1414) and urge him to step back from the brink of war and continue to work with other nations and the UN to address Iraq's threats.
- Call your Members of Congress (Capitol Switchboard: 202-224-3121) and ask them to convey the same message to the President.
- Learn more about the work of Catholic Relief Services in Iraq and read the full text of the joint USCCB/CRS action alerts on Iraq by visiting the CRS website at www.catholicrelief.org.
- Pray for peace with family and friends, at your parish and in large interfaith gatherings. A prayer service is available on the CRS web site. Click on the "Iraq: Past Present and Future" icon on the home page.
- Write letters to the editor making the argument for peaceful alternatives to war with Iraq.
- Hold or with the ones who will suffer most from war with Iraq.